



Employee Engagement Revisited: Integrating Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management Theories into a Comprehensive Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

In a competitive business environment, employee engagement is essential for effectiveness and sustainability. Employers across different sectors see that engaged employees are more committed, put in extra effort, and perform better. This makes employee engagement a crucial issue for HRM within a company's overall strategy. Although there is a lot of literature on the topic, theoretical views on employee engagement often differ, especially regarding HRM theories and organizational behavior theories.

This paper is about employee engagement. The goal is to bring different ideas and create a clear picture of what employee engagement is. We want to understand employee engagement from different angles.

To do this we looked at what other people have written about employee engagement. We studied the ideas of Social Exchange Theory, Ability-Motivation-Opportunity framework, Job Demands-Resources model and Psychological Contract Theory. These ideas help us understand why employees get engaged and what happens when they do.

We then created a framework that shows how Human Resource Management practices what people think and feel employee engagement and how well a company does are all connected. This study helps us understand how all these things work together. We made a model that brings all these ideas together. This will help us learn more about how companies can use this information to make their employees more engaged.

We also talked about what our study means and what we might learn from it in the future. We think our study can help companies create strategies to make their employees more engaged. Employee engagement is important for companies. We want to help them understand how to make it happen. We hope that our study will help other people do research on employee engagement and learn more, about how to make it work.

Keywords: Human resource management; Social exchange theory; AMO framework; Job demands–resources model; Psychological contract; Strategic HRM; Indian organizations.

Introduction

Due to globalization, technical innovation, digitalization, and changing socioeconomic environments, the modern workplace is evolving more quickly than ever. Additionally, businesses are increasing workplace flexibility, implementing hybrid work models, employing people in knowledge-based and knowledge-based roles, and raising productivity standards. At the same time, workers' expectations have shifted, and they now want progress, meaningful



employment, well-being, a work-life balance, and a sense of community at work.

These developments have compelled the HR (human resource management) area to take a more focused approach to employee engagement as a key HRM priority.

Due to its correlation with four important organizational outcomes—productivity, employee retention, discretionary effort, and overall performance—employee engagement has also gained attention. Sustained organizational effectiveness is more likely to involve engaged employees' dedication, inventiveness, and organizational citizenship behaviors. The strategic importance of engagement-oriented HR strategies is shown by the fact that disengagement is linked to higher absenteeism, intentions to leave, and lower performance. In the Indian organizational context, which includes industries like information technology, education, manufacturing, and the public sector that struggle with issues like talent turnover and retention, skills shortages, workforce diversity, and shifting employment dynamics, the significance of employee engagement is particularly clear. Organizations have even more motivation to use HRM interventions to raise this degree of employee engagement given India's comparatively youthful workforce and growing exposure to international work patterns.

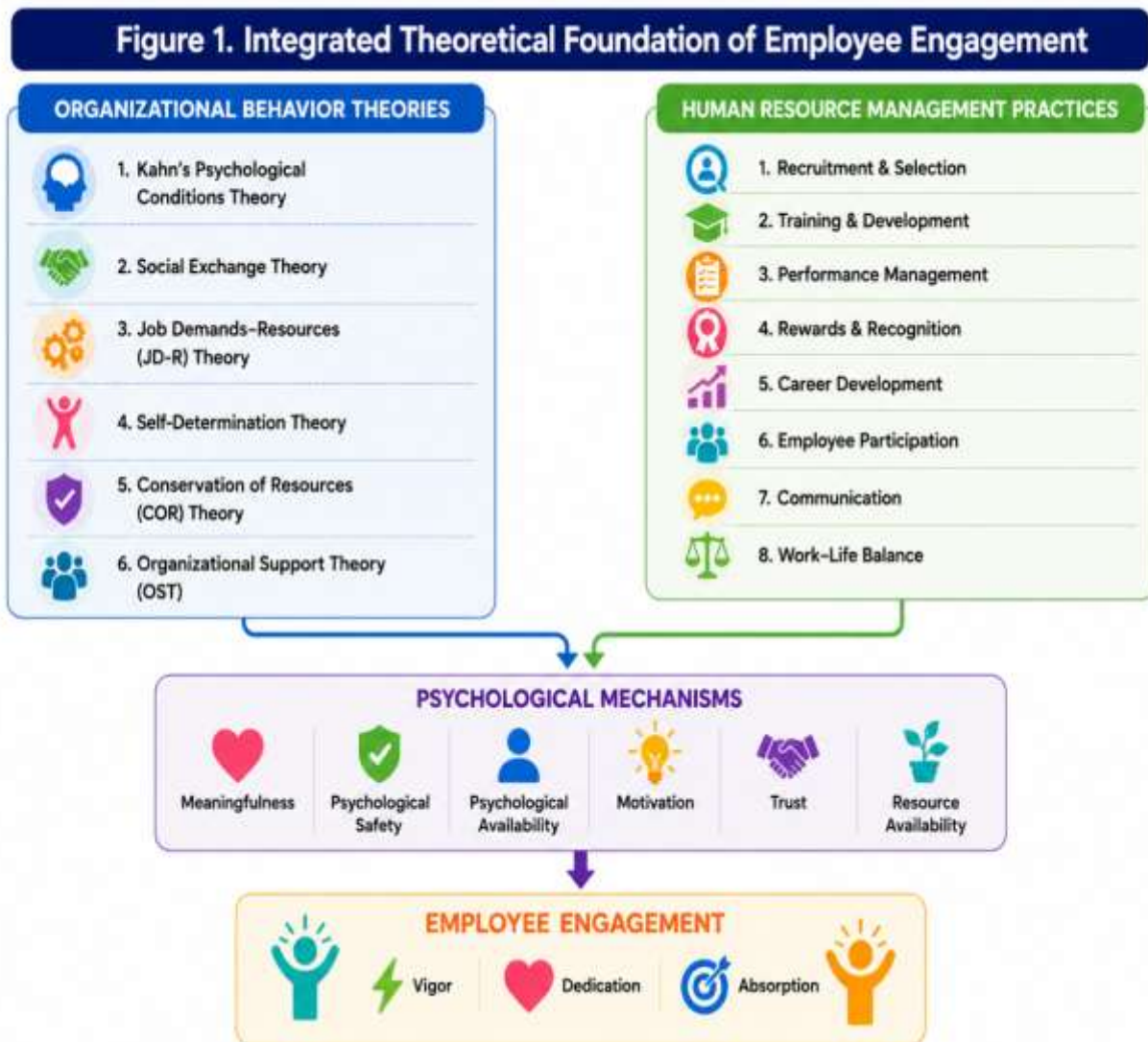
The literature on employee engagement, however, is theoretically uneven and comprises research that selectively borrows from several theoretical frameworks with inadequate integration, despite significant scholarly attention. The lack of a comprehensive theoretical approach leads to a confused understanding of how to maintain involvement. In order to improve these methods of comprehending employee engagement, this study will investigate the theoretical foundations and integration of key HRM and organizational behavior ideas.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to build an integrative conceptual model, suggest future research objectives, and critically examine the major theories that underpin employee engagement initiatives. This study is structured as follows: after discussing the notion of employee engagement and its modifications, it looks at some pertinent theoretical underpinnings. The paper then presents a conceptual framework and offers research and practice implications.

Conceptual Background of the Study Definition and Scope of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is considered to be a multi-dimensional construct. It gauges the extent to which employees are cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally committed to their work roles and to the organizational goals. According to Kahn (1990), engagement means that employees harness their selves for their work roles, i.e. that they fully express themselves in terms of body and soul for their jobs. The engagement construct has been elaborated on by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002). They defined it as a positive, efficient and meaningful psychological state of the work-related construct, comprising of vigor, dedication and absorption. Saks (2006) distinguished between job engagement and organizational engagement. The main factor for both types of engagement is the social exchange relationship between employees and employers.

The scope of employee engagement extends beyond individual attitudes to encompass HRM practices, leadership behaviors, organizational culture, and workplace conditions that collectively shape employees' willingness to invest discretionary effort. In contemporary HRM, employee engagement is viewed as a strategic outcome influenced by both organizational systems and individual psychological processes, making it a central concern for organizational effectiveness and sustainability. A key description of the topic is illustrated in Figure 01 which depicts Integrated Theoretical Foundation of Employee Engagement.



Key Concepts and Terminologies

Understanding employee engagement requires an understanding of a number of key concepts. Absorption is a reflection of intense concentration and immersion in work tasks, while vigor is a sign of high levels of energy and mental resilience at work. Dedication is a sign of significance, enthusiasm, and pride. Engagement is facilitated by psychological conditions like meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Additionally, constructs such as job resources (e.g., autonomy, support, and feedback), employee voice, trust, and perceived organizational support frequently appear in engagement-related discourse and are closely linked to HRM interventions.

Historical Evolution of the Concept -

The human relations movement and early motivational theories, which emphasized employee involvement and job satisfaction, are where the concept of employee engagement originated. However, the formal articulation of employee engagement emerged with Kahn's (1990) seminal work on personal engagement and disengagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement framework and the work of Schaufeli et al. (2002) were two major contributors to the rise of engagement in organizational behavior and HRM literature in the early 2000s. Over time, the concept has evolved from an individual-level psychological state to a strategic HRM construct linked with organizational performance, well-being, and competitive advantage.

Strengths:

- Emphasizes the strategic value of employee development
- Links HR investments with long-term organizational performance



Limitations:

- Treats employees largely as economic assets
- Underemphasizes emotional and relational aspects of engagement

2. Core Assumptions of the Resource-Based View (RBV):

According to RBV, valuable, scarce, unique, and non-substitutable resources provide a long-term competitive advantage (VRIN). These requirements can be met by human resources if they are managed well. Relevance to Employee Engagement:

An intangible strategic resource that boosts productivity, innovation, and service quality is regarded as employee engagement. Competitors won't be able to match highly engaged workers, giving them a competitive advantage.

Strengths:

- Frames engagement as an important organizational capability
- Connects HRM with firm-level performance

Limitations:

- Places a greater emphasis on outcomes than on the underlying mental processes
- Insufficient guidance regarding individual engagement development

3. Fundamental Hypotheses of the Behavioral Theory of HRM:

According to the Behavioral Theory of Human Resource Management, HR practices influence employee actions that are needed to effectively implement organizational strategies. Employees are expected to play different roles in response to various strategies. HR practices such as performance management, rewards, and participation systems shape behaviors that foster engagement, including discretionary effort and proactive involvement.

Strengths:

- Clearly links HR practices with desired employee behaviors
- Connects engagement to strategic goals

Limitations:

- Might simplify employee feelings and attitudes too much
- Less focus on individual and contextual differences

4. Basic Hypotheses of Systems Theory:

Systems Theory views organizations as open systems comprising interrelated subsystems that interact with the external environment. The entire system is affected by changes in one subsystem. Relevance to Employee Engagement:

The interaction of multiple organizational components, including HR policies, leadership, culture, and work design, results in employee engagement. HR practices alone cannot be credited with engagement.

Strengths:

- Provides a holistic view of engagement
- Stresses the interconnectedness of organizational factors

Limitations:

- Conceptual in nature and challenging to test empirically
- Isn't specific enough to find the key factors that drive engagement

5. Institutional Theory Core Assumptions:

Institutional Theory emphasizes that organizational practices are shaped by regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures from the external environment.

Relevance to Employee Engagement:

Professional standards, societal expectations, and labor laws all have an impact on engagement practices, especially in countries like India where cultural and regulatory factors are significant. **Strengths:**

- Highlights the role of external context
- Explains similarities in engagement practices across organizations



Limitations:

- Undervalues individual differences and managerial autonomy
- A lack of attention paid to internal psychological processes

6. Fundamental Assumptions of Psychological Contract Theory:

The term "psychological contract theory" refers to employees' beliefs about the responsibilities they share with their employer. Attitudes and actions of employees are influenced by how these obligations are met or not met. Relevance to Employee Engagement:

Employees are more likely to be engaged when organizations fulfill implicit and explicit promises regarding career growth, fairness, and support. A breach of the psychological contract results in disengagement.

Strengths:

- Strongly associated with commitment, trust, and engagement
- Captures the emotional aspect of workplace relationships.

Limitations:

- Measurement is difficult and highly subjective
- Varies depending on the person and the situation.

Research Gap and Problem Statement

Even though more research is being done on employee engagement, there are still a few big holes in the existing literature that make it hard to get a complete theoretical understanding of the concept. First, research on employee engagement is characterized by fragmented theoretical approaches, with studies selectively drawing from a variety of theories like the AMO framework, Psychological Contract Theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, and Social Exchange Theory. Although each perspective provides useful insights, it is frequently applied in isolation, resulting in partial explanations of engagement that fail to capture its dynamic and multifaceted nature.

Second, integrative conceptual frameworks that systematically synthesize behavioral perspectives, psychological mechanisms, and strategic HRM theories to explain how employee engagement is developed and maintained are scarce. Without adequately describing the underlying processes that link HRM practices to engagement-related behaviors, the majority of the existing literature focuses on determining engagement's antecedents or outcomes. The lack of theoretical integration hinders the accumulation of knowledge and reduces engagement research's ability to explain things.

Thirdly, theoretical engagement studies continue to underrepresent the Indian organizational context. The literature is dominated by empirical research from Western contexts, but conceptual models that take into account India's particular institutional environment, workforce demographics, cultural values, and regulatory framework are relatively few. As a result, existing theories' applicability to Indian organizations in IT, education, manufacturing, and the public sector has not been sufficiently investigated. There is a clear need for conceptual synthesis that brings together various HRM and organizational behavior theories into a cohesive framework in light of these gaps. An integrative theoretical model of employee engagement that bridges disparate perspectives, incorporates contextual relevance, and serves as a solid foundation for subsequent empirical research is the goal of this study.

Objectives of the Study-

The following goals guide the current theoretical investigation:

1. To critically analyze the main theories of organizational behavior and HRM that describe the idea, causes, and effects of employee engagement.
2. To include several theoretical stances into an all-encompassing and logical conceptual framework that describes how employee engagement develops inside companies.
3. To determine the main organizational and psychological factors by which HRM approaches affect employee engagement.
4. To put out theoretically supported claims that can direct next empirical studies on employee engagement.
5. To improve employee engagement theory's contextual relevance, especially in relation to Indian firms.



Proposed Conceptual Framework of Employee Engagement Conceptual Framework Overview-

This study proposes a conceptual framework that explains employee engagement as a result of strategic HRM practices operating through key psychological mechanisms and contextual factors, based on an integrative review of HRM and organizational behavior theories. The framework synthesizes insights from Social Exchange Theory, the AMO framework, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, Psychological Contract Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV).

Diagrammatic Representation of the Conceptual Framework HRM Practices-

(Ability, Motivation, Opportunity-enhancing)



Psychological Mechanisms

(Meaningfulness, Psychological Safety, Trust, Perceived Organizational Support)



Employee Engagement

(Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioral)



Employee Outcomes

(Performance, OCB, Retention, Well-being)



Organizational Outcomes

(Productivity, Sustainability)

Explanation of Key Variables-

HRM Practices (Independent Variables)

HRM practices form the foundational drivers of employee engagement. These, based on the AMO framework, are:

- Activities that improve abilities include career planning, skill development, and training.
- Methods for boosting motivation include performance reviews, awards, and other forms of praise.
- Opportunities-enhancing practices like employee participation, autonomy, and voice mechanisms.

These practices show that the company cares about its employees and supports them.

Psychological Mechanisms (Mediating Variables)

Psychological mechanisms explain how HRM practices translate into engagement. The following are important mediators:

- Psychological significance
- Safety for the mind
- Perceived support from the organization and trust
- Psychological contract fulfillment

Employees' internal assessments of their work and organizational relationships are captured by these variables.

Employee Engagement (Core Construct)

Employee engagement is thought of as a multifaceted concept that includes:

- Cognitive engagement (concentration and comprehension)
- Emotional involvement (attachment and enthusiasm)
- Behavioral engagement (involvement and discretionary effort)

Outcomes of Employee Engagement (Dependent Variables)

Employees who are engaged are more likely to demonstrate:



- Better performance at work
- Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)
- Lower turnover intentions and higher retention
- Enhanced employee well-being

At the organizational level, engagement contributes to productivity, sustainability, and competitive advantage (RBV).

Moderating Variables

The strength of the relationships proposed in the framework is influenced by:

- Style of leadership (such as transformational or servant leadership)
- Organizational culture
- The social and institutional context, which is especially important for Indian organizations

Theoretical Justification for Linkages-

Social Exchange Theory explains the reciprocal relationship between HRM practices and engagement.

AMO Framework clarifies how HR systems enable engagement through ability, motivation, and opportunity.

JD-R Model highlights the role of job resources in fostering engagement.

Psychological Contract Theory explains engagement as a response to fulfilled organizational obligations.

RBV positions employee engagement as a strategic, inimitable organizational resource.

Development of Theoretical Propositions-

Based on the proposed framework, the following propositions are advanced:

P1: Employee engagement is positively impacted by HRM strategies that increase ability, motivation, and opportunities.

P2: The relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement is mediated by psychological mechanisms such as meaningfulness, psychological safety, and perceived organizational support.

P3: Employee engagement is positively impacted by psychological contract fulfillment.

P4: Individual-level outcomes including performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee well-being are positively impacted by employee engagement.

P5: Productivity and competitive advantage are two organizational-level outcomes that are positively impacted by employee engagement.

P6: The association between HRM practices and employee engagement is moderated by organizational culture and leadership style.

Discussion

The present study offers a theoretically grounded interpretation of employee engagement by integrating multiple HRM and organizational behavior perspectives into a cohesive conceptual framework. The proposed model emphasizes that employee engagement is not merely an attitudinal outcome but a dynamic psychological state shaped by strategic HRM practices, mediated through key psychological mechanisms, and influenced by contextual factors. By positioning HRM practices as primary antecedents and psychological processes as mediators, the framework provides a more nuanced understanding of how engagement is developed and sustained within organizations.

In comparison with existing models of employee engagement, such as Kahn's psychological conditions framework, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, and the AMO framework, the proposed model extends prior conceptualizations by integrating these perspectives rather than treating them as competing explanations. While Kahn's model highlights meaningfulness, safety, and availability at the individual level, and the JD-R model focuses on the role of job resources, the present framework situates these psychological elements within a broader strategic HRM system. Similarly, while the AMO framework explains how HR practices enhance employee performance, the proposed model explicitly incorporates engagement as a mediating mechanism linking HRM practices to employee and organizational outcomes. This integrative approach addresses the fragmented nature of existing engagement



theories and enhances their explanatory power.

The relevance of the proposed framework is particularly significant in the Indian organizational context. Indian organizations operate within a complex institutional environment characterized by regulatory influences, cultural diversity, hierarchical structures, and a rapidly changing workforce. Sectors such as information technology, education, manufacturing, and the public sector face challenges related to talent retention, employee well-being, and performance pressures. The inclusion of institutional context and leadership as moderating variables allows the framework to capture the unique socio-cultural and regulatory realities of Indian workplaces, thereby improving its contextual applicability.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to HRM literature by advancing an integrated conceptualization of employee engagement that bridges strategic, behavioral, and psychological perspectives. By positioning engagement as a strategic HRM outcome and a valuable organizational resource, the framework aligns employee engagement research more closely with contemporary HRM theory. Furthermore, the study provides a structured foundation for future empirical research, encouraging theory-driven investigation and contributing to cumulative knowledge development in employee engagement scholarship.

Below is a clear, applied, and journal-appropriate “Managerial Implications” section, translating the theoretical insights of your study into actionable guidance for key organizational stakeholders.

Managerial Implications

The integrative theoretical framework proposed in this study offers several important implications for managerial practice, particularly for stakeholders involved in designing and implementing HRM policies and people management strategies.

Implications for HR Managers-

The findings underscore the importance of adopting a systemic and engagement-oriented HRM approach rather than isolated HR interventions. HR managers should design integrated HR practices aligned with the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework to enhance employee engagement. Investment in skill development, fair and transparent reward systems, and opportunities for employee participation can strengthen psychological mechanisms such as trust, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety. Additionally, HR managers should regularly assess employee perceptions of HR practices to ensure alignment with psychological contract expectations, thereby preventing disengagement arising from perceived breaches.

Implications for Policy Makers

For organizational and institutional policy makers, the study highlights the need to formulate policies that promote employee well-being, participation, and inclusive work practices. Policies related to flexible work arrangements, employee voice mechanisms, and fair employment conditions can create enabling environments that support engagement. In the Indian context, where regulatory and institutional factors significantly influence HR practices, policymakers should ensure that labor policies and organizational guidelines encourage engagement-enhancing practices while safeguarding employee rights and dignity.

Implications for Organizational Leaders-

Organizational leaders play a critical role in translating HRM systems into lived employee experiences. The framework emphasizes leadership behaviors that foster trust, meaningful work, and psychological safety. Leaders should adopt supportive and empowering leadership styles, such as transformational or servant leadership, to strengthen the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement. By modeling ethical behavior, open communication, and respect, leaders can reinforce positive social exchange relationships that encourage discretionary effort and sustained engagement.

Implications for Training and Development Professionals-

Training and development professionals can utilize the framework to design learning interventions that go beyond skill enhancement to include engagement-focused developmental initiatives. Programs aimed at leadership development,



emotional intelligence, resilience, and employee well-being can strengthen psychological resources that contribute to engagement. Furthermore, creating opportunities for continuous learning and career development can enhance employees' sense of meaningfulness and long-term organizational attachment.

Implications for Future Research-

The conceptual framework proposed in this study provides multiple avenues for advancing employee engagement research. First, there is a strong need for empirical validation of the proposed framework across diverse organizational settings. Future studies may test the proposed relationships and propositions using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches to examine the mediating and moderating effects identified in the model.

Second, sector-specific studies can offer deeper insights into how employee engagement manifests across different industries. Given the heterogeneity of the Indian economy, future research could examine engagement dynamics in sectors such as information technology, education, manufacturing, healthcare, and the public sector. Such studies would help identify context-specific drivers and outcomes of engagement while enhancing the generalizability of engagement theory.

Third, future research should adopt longitudinal research designs to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of employee engagement over time. Longitudinal studies can provide stronger causal inferences and help understand how changes in HRM practices, leadership, and organizational context influence engagement trajectories. Additionally, mixed-method research designs combining surveys, interviews, and case studies can offer richer, more nuanced insights into employee experiences and psychological mechanisms underlying engagement.

Finally, there is significant potential to integrate employee engagement research with HR analytics and artificial intelligence (AI). Future studies can explore how data-driven HR systems, predictive analytics, and AI-enabled decision-making influence engagement outcomes. Integrating theoretical frameworks with advanced analytics can enhance measurement precision, support real-time engagement interventions, and contribute to the development of evidence-based HRM practices.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides a thorough conceptual framework for comprehending employee engagement, it should be noted that it has several limitations. First, rather than using empirical data, the study is mostly conceptual in nature, depending on a review and synthesis of current theories. As a result, there has been no empirical testing of the suggested connections and claims. Second, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the mechanisms by which HRM practices affect engagement in the absence of empirical confirmation. Third, although inclusive, the study's framework was created with an emphasis on the Indian organizational context, which may limit the model's applicability to other institutional and cultural contexts. To improve the framework's robustness and application, future studies should empirically test it in a variety of industries, nations, and organizational situations.

Conclusion-

By combining disparate viewpoints from organizational behavior and HRM literature into a coherent conceptual framework, this study increases the theoretical understanding of employee engagement. The study clarifies the psychological and organizational mechanisms that drive engagement and connects them to individual and organizational outcomes by synthesizing theories like Social Exchange Theory, the AMO framework, Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, Psychological Contract Theory, and Resource-Based View (RBV).

By offering a comprehensive viewpoint that views engagement as both a psychological state and a strategic resource, the suggested framework advances HRM studies by linking interpretations at the individual and organizational levels. The model's applicability to Indian firms and other emerging-market environments is increased by the inclusion of contextual aspects, especially leadership, organizational culture, and institutional effects.



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