



Employee Engagement in Driving Employee Performance: An Empirical and Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

Employee engagement has become a critical factor in determining employee performance in modern organizations, particularly amid rapid technological change and evolving work environments. However, inconsistencies in prior research indicate that the relationship between engagement and performance is not always direct and is influenced by various mediating and contextual factors. This study aims to analyze and conceptually integrate the role of employee engagement in driving employee performance while identifying key mechanisms that shape this relationship. The research employs a qualitative approach using a literature review design, collecting data from reputable academic sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly publications. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, involving data reduction, categorization, and synthesis to identify dominant patterns and theoretical linkages. The findings reveal that employee engagement significantly enhances employee performance through mediating variables such as psychological safety, organizational commitment, and leadership influence, while contextual factors including organizational culture and digital work environments determine the strength of this relationship. This study contributes by offering an integrated conceptual framework that positions engagement as a strategic driver of sustainable performance in organizations.

Keywords: Employee engagement, employee performance, psychological safety, organizational commitment, leadership, conceptual framework

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance has long been recognized as a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly in an increasingly dynamic and competitive global business environment characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifting workforce expectations [1]. Organizations are no longer solely reliant on traditional performance management systems; instead, they are progressively emphasizing human-centric approaches that prioritize psychological and emotional connections between employees and their work. In this context, employee engagement has emerged as a pivotal construct that reflects the degree to which employees are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally invested in their roles. Engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of motivation, commitment, and discretionary effort, which collectively

contribute to improved organizational outcomes. The growing relevance of employee engagement is further reinforced by contemporary organizational theories such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Social Exchange Theory, both of which highlight the reciprocal relationship between organizational support and employee contributions [2]. Consequently, understanding how employee engagement functions as a driving force behind employee performance is not only theoretically significant but also practically essential for organizations striving to maintain sustainable competitive advantage.

Despite the recognized importance of employee engagement, empirical evidence indicates that many organizations still struggle to cultivate and sustain high levels of engagement among their workforce [3]. Global workforce studies reveal that only approximately 20–25% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs, while the majority remain either passively engaged or actively disengaged, leading to substantial productivity losses [4]. For instance, reports from international consulting firms estimate that disengaged employees can cost organizations up to 18% of their annual salary in lost productivity. In addition, organizations with low engagement levels experience higher turnover rates, often exceeding 30%, compared to organizations with strong engagement cultures, which typically maintain turnover rates below 10% [5]. These conditions are particularly concerning in developing economies, where organizational resources are often limited, and inefficiencies can significantly hinder growth. Furthermore, the rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements has introduced new challenges in maintaining engagement, including reduced social interaction, weakened organizational identification, and increased psychological detachment [6]. These quantitative indicators underscore the urgency of addressing employee engagement as a strategic priority to enhance performance outcomes and organizational effectiveness.

However, the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance remains a subject of ongoing academic debate, with prior studies presenting divergent findings. Several scholars argue that employee engagement has a direct and significant positive effect on employee performance, emphasizing that engaged employees tend to exhibit higher productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction [7]. In contrast, other studies contend that the relationship is not inherently direct but is mediated by variables such as psychological safety, organizational commitment, or leadership style, suggesting that engagement alone may not be sufficient to drive performance without supportive organizational conditions [8][9]. Furthermore, some researchers highlight contextual inconsistencies, noting that the strength of the relationship varies across industries, cultural settings, and organizational structures, which may weaken the generalizability of findings [10]. These conflicting perspectives indicate that while employee engagement is widely acknowledged as important, its exact role and mechanism in influencing employee performance remain inconclusive. The lack of consensus among prior studies creates a theoretical ambiguity that necessitates further empirical and conceptual investigation to clarify the nature of this relationship.

Based on the inconsistencies identified in previous research, several research gaps can be articulated. First, there is a theoretical gap concerning the lack of integration between engagement theories and performance frameworks, resulting in fragmented explanations of how engagement translates into measurable outcomes. Second, an empirical gap exists due to inconsistent findings regarding the strength and direction of the relationship between employee engagement and performance across different contexts. Third, a contextual gap is evident, particularly in emerging economies and evolving work environments such as digital and hybrid workplaces, where engagement dynamics may differ significantly from traditional settings. Addressing these gaps requires a more comprehensive approach that combines empirical analysis with conceptual synthesis to develop a more coherent understanding of the engagement-performance linkage. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its attempt to reconceptualize employee engagement not merely as an independent variable but as a strategic mechanism that interacts with organizational and psychological factors to drive performance. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and examining contextual variations, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced and holistic explanation of the relationship between employee engagement and employee performance.

In line with the identified gaps and proposed novelty, this study aims to analyze and conceptualize the role of employee engagement in driving employee performance through a comprehensive empirical and theoretical approach. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) examine the direct influence of employee engagement on employee performance, (2) explore the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors that shape this relationship, and (3) develop a conceptual framework that integrates existing theories to provide a more robust explanation of how engagement contributes to performance outcomes. By achieving these objectives, the study is expected to contribute to both academic literature and managerial practice, offering insights that can guide organizations in designing effective engagement strategies to enhance employee performance. Ultimately, this research aspires to bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing evidence-based recommendations that support sustainable organizational development in an increasingly complex and competitive environment.

METHOD



The research method employed in this study is a qualitative approach using a literature review design, aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of employee engagement in driving employee performance from both empirical and conceptual perspectives [11]. This approach is appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically examine, synthesize, and interpret findings from existing scholarly works to build a coherent theoretical foundation. The study focuses on analyzing patterns, relationships, and underlying mechanisms that explain how employee engagement influences employee performance across various organizational contexts [12]. The data used in this research are secondary data obtained from reputable academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other relevant scientific publications related to employee engagement, employee performance, psychological safety, leadership, and organizational commitment. Data collection is conducted through a structured documentation technique by identifying, selecting, and reviewing literature based on relevance, credibility, and alignment with the research objectives.

The data analysis technique in this study utilizes qualitative content analysis, which involves the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher filters and categorizes key insights from the selected literature to identify dominant themes and recurring arguments regarding the relationship between employee engagement and performance [13]. The data are then organized systematically to enable comparative analysis across different theoretical perspectives and empirical findings. In the final stage, the researcher interprets the synthesized findings to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework that explains how employee engagement functions as a driving force for employee performance, including identifying mediating variables and contextual influences [14]. To enhance the validity and reliability of the study, source triangulation is applied by comparing multiple scholarly sources. Through this approach, the research is expected to generate a robust and integrative understanding that contributes to the advancement of knowledge in human resource management and organizational behavior.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Direct Influence of Employee Engagement on Employee Performance

Employee engagement has been widely acknowledged as a fundamental driver of employee performance, particularly in contemporary organizational settings characterized by rapid change, heightened competition, and increasing reliance on human capital as a source of competitive advantage [15]. Conceptually, employee engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, which collectively reflect the extent to which employees invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies into their work roles. This multidimensional construct goes beyond mere job satisfaction, as it encapsulates a deeper level of involvement and commitment that directly influences how employees perform their tasks. From the perspective of organizational behavior, engaged employees tend to exhibit proactive attitudes, higher resilience, and a stronger alignment with organizational goals, all of which contribute to superior performance outcomes. Therefore, the direct influence of employee engagement on employee performance can be understood as a manifestation of how internal psychological investment translates into observable work behaviors and measurable productivity.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that employee engagement has a significant and positive impact on various dimensions of employee performance, including task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance. Engaged employees are more likely to exert discretionary effort, often referred to as “going the extra mile,” which enhances not only their individual output but also the overall effectiveness of the organization [4]. This phenomenon can be explained through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that when employees possess adequate job resources such as support, autonomy, and recognition they are more likely to develop higher levels of engagement, which in turn leads to improved performance. In this context, engagement acts as a motivational mechanism that energizes employees to utilize their capabilities optimally [16]. Moreover, engaged employees tend to demonstrate higher levels of concentration and persistence, enabling them to complete tasks more efficiently and with greater accuracy, thereby directly improving performance metrics.

In addition to enhancing productivity, employee engagement also plays a crucial role in fostering creativity and innovation, which are essential components of performance in knowledge-based and dynamic industries. Engaged employees are more inclined to generate new ideas, propose improvements, and participate actively in problem-solving processes [16]. This is largely because engagement fosters a sense of ownership and psychological attachment to one’s work, encouraging individuals to contribute beyond their formal job descriptions. Furthermore, the emotional dimension of engagement, particularly dedication, strengthens employees’ sense of purpose and pride in their work, which further motivates them to achieve higher performance standards. As a result, organizations that successfully cultivate high levels of engagement often experience not only improved efficiency but also enhanced innovation capabilities, which are critical for long-term sustainability.

The direct relationship between employee engagement and performance is also reinforced by Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that employees reciprocate the positive treatment they receive from their organization with increased effort and performance. When employees perceive that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they are more likely to respond with higher levels of engagement, which subsequently translates into improved performance. This reciprocal relationship highlights the importance of organizational support, leadership, and human resource practices in fostering engagement [17]. However, once engagement is established, its influence on performance becomes evident through increased motivation, stronger commitment, and greater alignment with organizational objectives. In this sense, engagement serves as an internal driver that shapes employee behavior in a way that directly enhances performance outcomes.

Another important aspect of the direct influence of employee engagement on performance is its role in reducing counterproductive work behaviors and enhancing work discipline. Engaged employees are less likely to engage in behaviors such as absenteeism, lateness, or workplace deviance, as they feel a stronger sense of responsibility and attachment to their work. This not only improves individual performance but also contributes to a more positive and productive work environment. Additionally, engaged employees tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), such as helping colleagues, volunteering for additional tasks, and supporting organizational initiatives. These behaviors, while not always formally recognized in performance evaluations, significantly enhance overall organizational effectiveness and indirectly strengthen performance outcomes.



In the context of modern work environments characterized by digital transformation and hybrid work arrangements, employee engagement becomes even more critical in sustaining performance levels. The shift towards remote and flexible work has altered traditional supervision mechanisms, placing greater emphasis on self-regulation and intrinsic motivation. In such settings, engaged employees are more capable of maintaining productivity, managing their time effectively, and staying committed to their tasks despite the absence of direct supervision. This highlights the robustness of engagement as a driver of performance, as it operates internally within individuals rather than relying solely on external controls. Consequently, organizations that prioritize engagement are better positioned to maintain high performance levels in diverse and evolving work environments.

Despite the strong evidence supporting the direct influence of employee engagement on performance, it is important to acknowledge that the magnitude of this relationship may vary depending on individual and organizational factors. For instance, differences in personality traits, job characteristics, and organizational culture can influence how engagement manifests and affects performance. However, the overall trend remains consistent: higher levels of engagement are associated with better performance outcomes. This suggests that while contextual factors may moderate the strength of the relationship, the fundamental link between engagement and performance remains robust across different settings.

In synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes evident that employee engagement functions as a critical psychological and behavioral mechanism that directly drives employee performance. By fostering higher levels of energy, dedication, and immersion in work tasks, engagement enhances not only the quantity but also the quality of employee output. Moreover, its influence extends beyond individual performance to include broader organizational benefits such as improved teamwork, innovation, and organizational effectiveness. Therefore, understanding and leveraging employee engagement as a strategic driver of performance is essential for organizations seeking to achieve sustainable success in an increasingly complex and competitive environment.

2. Mediating and Contextual Mechanisms in the Engagement–Performance Relationship

The relationship between employee engagement and employee performance cannot be fully understood through a simple direct-effect perspective, as contemporary organizational research increasingly emphasizes the presence of intervening mechanisms that shape how engagement translates into performance outcomes [18]. Employee engagement, as a psychological state, provides the energy and motivation necessary for performance, yet its effectiveness is often contingent upon underlying psychological and organizational processes that either strengthen or weaken its impact. In this regard, mediating variables play a crucial role by acting as transmission channels through which engagement influences performance, transforming internal motivation into observable work behaviors. Without these mediating mechanisms, engagement may remain a latent psychological condition that does not fully materialize into optimal performance outcomes.

At the same time, contextual factors serve as boundary conditions that determine the extent to which employee engagement can effectively drive performance. Organizational environments characterized by supportive leadership, inclusive cultures, and adaptive systems tend to amplify the positive effects of engagement, whereas rigid, hierarchical, or resource-constrained environments may suppress its potential [19]. The increasing complexity of modern workplaces, including the rise of digital transformation and hybrid work systems, further highlights the importance of contextual influences in shaping the engagement–performance dynamic. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of this relationship requires not only an examination of mediating mechanisms but also a careful consideration of the contextual conditions in which employees operate.

1. Psychological Safety as a Mediating Mechanism

Psychological safety plays a pivotal role in translating employee engagement into enhanced performance by creating an environment where individuals feel secure to express ideas, take risks, and engage in meaningful collaboration without fear of negative consequences. When employees are psychologically safe, the energy and enthusiasm derived from engagement are more likely to manifest in proactive behaviors such as innovation, problem-solving, and open communication. In contrast, in environments lacking psychological safety, even highly engaged employees may withhold their contributions due to fear of criticism or failure, thereby limiting performance outcomes. Consequently, psychological safety acts as a critical bridge that enables engagement to be expressed in productive and performance-enhancing ways.

2. Organizational Commitment as a Mediating Mechanism

Organizational commitment serves as an important mechanism that strengthens the link between employee engagement and performance by fostering a deeper sense of loyalty and attachment to the organization. Engaged employees who develop strong commitment are more likely to align their personal goals with organizational objectives, resulting in consistent and sustained performance over time. This commitment encourages employees to go beyond formal job requirements, demonstrating persistence, accountability, and a willingness to contribute to organizational success. Without strong organizational commitment, engagement may produce only short-term motivation, whereas its combination with commitment ensures long-term performance consistency and stability.

3. Leadership Style as a Contextual Enabler

Leadership style significantly influences how employee engagement translates into performance by shaping the work environment and providing direction, support, and motivation. Transformational and supportive leadership styles, for instance, can enhance the impact of engagement by inspiring employees, fostering trust, and creating a shared vision that aligns individual efforts with organizational goals. In contrast, authoritarian or unsupportive leadership may hinder the expression of engagement, limiting employees' ability to perform at their best despite high internal motivation. Thus, leadership functions as a contextual enabler that determines whether engagement is effectively converted into high performance or remains underutilized.

4. Organizational and Work Environment Context (Digital and Hybrid Systems)



The broader organizational and work environment, particularly in the context of digital transformation and hybrid work systems, plays a crucial role in shaping the engagement–performance relationship. Flexible work arrangements, digital collaboration tools, and remote work structures can either enhance or diminish the effectiveness of engagement depending on how they are managed. Engaged employees in well-structured digital environments are often able to maintain high levels of productivity, autonomy, and innovation, whereas poorly managed systems may lead to isolation, reduced collaboration, and decreased performance. Therefore, the alignment between engagement strategies and the evolving nature of work environments is essential for sustaining high performance outcomes.

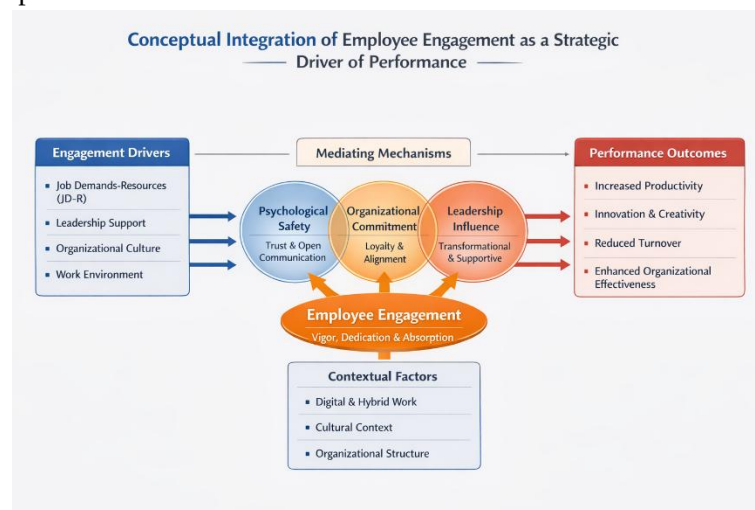
In synthesizing these mediating and contextual mechanisms, it becomes evident that employee engagement alone is not sufficient to guarantee enhanced employee performance, but rather operates within a complex system of psychological and organizational dynamics. Mediating variables such as psychological safety and organizational commitment function as internal pathways that convert engagement into actionable performance behaviors, while contextual factors such as leadership and work environment determine the effectiveness of these pathways. This integrated perspective highlights that engagement is both a necessary and conditional driver of performance, requiring supportive mechanisms and environments to fully realize its potential.

Understanding the mediating and contextual dimensions of the engagement–performance relationship provides valuable insights for both theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, it enriches existing models by incorporating multi-layered interactions that explain how and when engagement influences performance. From a practical perspective, it underscores the importance for organizations to not only foster employee engagement but also to create enabling conditions that allow engagement to thrive and translate into meaningful outcomes. By adopting a holistic approach that integrates engagement, mediating mechanisms, and contextual factors, organizations can more effectively enhance employee performance and achieve sustainable organizational success.

3. Conceptual Integration of Employee Engagement as a Strategic Driver of Performance

Employee engagement has increasingly been positioned as a central construct in understanding how organizations can sustainably enhance employee performance in a complex and rapidly evolving business environment. The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 reflects a comprehensive integration of theoretical perspectives that explain how engagement functions not merely as an independent variable, but as a dynamic strategic mechanism embedded within broader organizational systems. In this model, employee engagement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption, which collectively represent the intensity of employees' psychological investment in their work. This investment becomes the foundational energy that drives work-related behaviors, enabling employees to perform tasks effectively, adapt to changing demands, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. By positioning engagement at the core of the model, the framework highlights its role as a catalyst that connects organizational inputs with performance outcomes.

The model emphasizes that employee engagement does not emerge in isolation but is shaped by various antecedent factors categorized as engagement drivers, such as job demands-resources (JD-R), leadership support, organizational culture, and the work environment. These drivers function as critical inputs that influence the level and quality of engagement experienced by employees. For instance, adequate job resources and supportive leadership can enhance employees' sense of autonomy and competence, thereby strengthening their engagement levels [2]. Conversely, excessive job demands without sufficient resources may lead to burnout, reducing engagement and ultimately affecting performance. This conceptualization aligns with contemporary organizational theories that stress the importance of balancing demands and resources to optimize employee outcomes. Thus, the framework provides a structured understanding of how engagement is initiated and sustained within organizational contexts before it translates into performance.



Source: Data developed by the researcher (2026)

Figure 1. Conceptual Integration of Employee Engagement as a Strategic

The figure illustrates that the influence of employee engagement on performance is not direct and linear but operates through several mediating mechanisms, namely psychological safety, organizational commitment, and leadership influence. These mediators serve as critical pathways that transform the internal energy generated by engagement into observable and measurable performance outcomes. Psychological safety, for example, enables employees to express ideas freely and take initiative without fear of negative consequences, thereby fostering innovation and collaboration [3]. Organizational commitment strengthens employees' emotional attachment to the organization, ensuring that engagement is sustained over time and translated into consistent performance. Meanwhile, leadership influence acts as both a mediator and contextual enabler, shaping how engagement is directed toward achieving organizational objectives. Together, these mediating mechanisms highlight the complexity of the engagement–performance relationship and underscore the importance of internal organizational processes in facilitating this transformation.



In addition to mediating mechanisms, the model also incorporates contextual factors such as digital and hybrid work environments, cultural context, and organizational structure, which function as boundary conditions affecting the strength and direction of the engagement–performance relationship. These factors are particularly relevant in modern organizational settings where traditional work patterns are increasingly replaced by flexible and technology-driven arrangements [4]. For instance, digital and hybrid work systems can enhance employee autonomy and flexibility, thereby strengthening engagement, but they may also introduce challenges such as reduced social interaction and communication barriers. Similarly, organizational culture plays a crucial role in determining whether engagement is encouraged and supported or constrained by rigid norms and practices. By integrating these contextual variables, the model acknowledges that engagement operates within a broader ecosystem that can either amplify or diminish its impact on performance.

The model demonstrates that when engagement, mediating mechanisms, and contextual factors are aligned effectively, they collectively lead to enhanced performance outcomes, including increased productivity, innovation and creativity, reduced turnover, and improved organizational effectiveness. These outcomes reflect both individual-level and organizational-level benefits, indicating that engagement is not only valuable for employees but also for the organization as a whole. The inclusion of multiple performance indicators in the model provides a holistic perspective on how engagement contributes to various dimensions of success, rather than focusing solely on task performance. This comprehensive view is particularly important in today’s knowledge-based economy, where innovation and adaptability are as critical as efficiency and productivity.

In synthesizing the components of the conceptual framework it becomes evident that employee engagement serves as a strategic bridge that connects organizational resources and environmental conditions with desired performance outcomes. The model moves beyond simplistic cause-and-effect explanations by presenting engagement as part of an interconnected system involving multiple variables and processes. This integrative approach not only enhances the theoretical understanding of the engagement–performance relationship but also offers practical implications for organizations seeking to improve performance. By focusing on strengthening engagement drivers, optimizing mediating mechanisms, and aligning contextual factors, organizations can create an environment that enables employees to perform at their highest potential. Consequently, the framework provides a valuable foundation for both future research and practical implementation in the field of human resource management and organizational development.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that employee engagement is a key factor in improving employee performance and supporting overall organizational success. Employee engagement extends beyond simple motivation, as it reflects the extent to which employees are emotionally connected, committed, and actively involved in their work. The literature reviewed indicates that employees who demonstrate high levels of energy, dedication, and focus tend to perform more effectively, adapt more readily to change, and contribute innovative ideas that benefit the organization. Nevertheless, the influence of employee engagement on performance does not occur in isolation. Its effectiveness is often reinforced by factors such as psychological safety, organizational commitment, supportive leadership, and a positive work environment. These findings highlight that employee engagement functions within a broader organizational system, where its contribution to performance depends on the presence of conditions that encourage employees to feel valued, supported, and empowered. Consequently, efforts to enhance employee performance should not only focus on increasing engagement but also on creating an environment that enables engagement to translate into meaningful outcomes.

Based on these findings, organizations should adopt a comprehensive approach to strengthening employee engagement by addressing both individual and organizational factors that influence employee experiences. Building supportive leadership practices, fostering open communication, and creating a culture of trust and collaboration can help employees feel more connected to their work and the organization. In addition, organizations need to pay greater attention to employee well-being and psychological safety, particularly as workplaces continue to evolve through digitalization and hybrid working arrangements. Maintaining strong social connections, providing opportunities for development, and recognizing employee contributions are important strategies for sustaining engagement over time. Future research is encouraged to examine the relationship between employee engagement and performance across different industries, organizational settings, and cultural contexts. Further studies may also explore additional factors that strengthen or weaken this relationship, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how employee engagement can be leveraged to support long-term organizational performance and sustainability.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The author confirms that this manuscript was prepared solely through independent scholarly work without the assistance of any generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools. All processes, including literature analysis, interpretation, and writing, were conducted manually by the author. The author assumes complete responsibility for the authenticity, reliability, and academic integrity of the content presented in this study.

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