

Revisiting Employee Engagement: A Systematic Review of Emerging Perspectives

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Keywords	ABSTRACT
Employee engagement; Human resource management; corporate culture; organizational behavior; workforce values; systematic literature review.	This research aims to explore the conceptual shift in the meaning of employee engagement through a systematic literature review (SLR) approach based on the PRISMA protocol. The review analyzes 17 selected articles published between 2006 and 2025 to identify the evolving dynamics of understanding, influencing factors, and approaches to fostering employee engagement. The findings indicate that employee engagement is no longer narrowly understood as mere attachment to job tasks or roles but has evolved into a multidimensional construct influenced by personal values, sustainability, digitalization, and the new generation's expectations for meaningful work. The review also reveals that organizational support, leadership quality, and technology integration have become increasingly prominent factors in shaping employee engagement. The theoretical implications highlight the need for a new, more adaptive and contextual conceptual model, while the practical implications point to the importance of value-based, employee-experience-driven human resource management strategies. This study contributes to enriching the understanding of engagement in the ever-evolving modern work landscape.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is a multidimensional concept that refers to employees' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral attachment to both their work and their organization. Since it was first introduced in academic literature by Kahn (1990) and further developed by Saks (2006), employee engagement has been positioned as a crucial factor in supporting sustainable organizational performance. Saks (2006) specifically distinguished between job engagement and organizational engagement, highlighting the importance of perceived organizational support and fairness in shaping such engagement. In practice, various studies have shown that high levels of engagement can result in increased productivity, loyalty, innovation, and reduced turnover intention and work fatigue (Pandita & Bedarkar, 2015; Mishra & Biswal, 2024).

However, the meaning and approaches to employee engagement have evolved alongside the dynamics of the modern work environment. Engagement is no longer merely understood as an affective response to the work environment but has increasingly been recognized as a strategic tool in human resource management. Recent studies have started to emphasize the influence of the values of new generations, particularly Gen Z, on engagement expectations in the workplace (Ibrahim & Prabowo, 2023). Lulewicz-Sas et al. (2024) found

that younger generations' orientation toward social issues, sustainability (ESG), and organizational transparency has encouraged a redefinition of engagement as an expression of personal values that must align with company vision (Jain & Yadav, 2025). This shift marks a transition from the old normative paradigm to a value-based engagement approach.

In addition to values, technology has become a major driver of the changing meaning of engagement. In workplaces dominated by digital systems and hybrid work models, engagement can no longer be interpreted conventionally. A study by Jindain and Gilitwala (2024) indicated that engagement in hybrid contexts requires trust, flexibility, and technological support to remain optimal. Meanwhile, gamification-based approaches and happiness index metrics, as described in research by Rogers and DuBois (2024), illustrate how technology can shape work behaviors and emotions in unprecedented ways. This transformation shows that engagement is increasingly moving toward more participatory, decentralized, and personalized forms.

These changes create both theoretical challenges and empirical opportunities. While many studies still rely on classical approaches to engagement, organizational realities and employee preferences have shifted significantly (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). At the same time, cultural and geographical contexts also play important roles that remain underexplored, particularly in Southeast Asian studies. Therefore, a systematic review of the employee engagement literature is timely and necessary—not only to identify the key factors currently influencing engagement but also to understand whether a significant conceptual shift has occurred in how the concept is approached (Raju & Srivastava, 2023).

Although employee engagement has been widely studied in human resource management literature, notable differences in conceptual approaches persist (Truss et al., 2013). Some studies view engagement as a psychological condition that reflects emotional and cognitive involvement in work (Pandita & Bedarkar, 2015), while others position it as an outcome of organizational practices such as leadership, reward systems, and work culture (Mishra & Biswal, 2024). On the other hand, some approaches see engagement as a strategic, ongoing process, especially in the context of flexible and digital work (Jindain & Gilitwala, 2024). This inconsistency highlights the lack of a comprehensive consensus on the dimensions and frameworks of engagement.

Beyond conceptual issues, methodological limitations are also significant. Most studies reviewed employed single-point cross-sectional quantitative methods, which are less capable of capturing the dynamic, longitudinal nature of engagement (Cohen et al., 2017; Johnson, 2024). Yet, engagement is inherently dynamic and may change with contexts such as organizational crises, shifts in work models, or individual career development. Longitudinal studies tracking fluctuations in engagement and its interaction with organizational variables such as leadership, trust, or technology remain rare in current literature (Rahman et al., 2025). This suggests significant opportunities to develop more adaptive and reflective research approaches in response to changing work realities.

Furthermore, research on employee engagement shows gaps in both contextual and contemporary issue coverage. Geographically, most studies originate from India, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, while Southeast Asia—with its collective and hierarchical work culture—remains underexplored. Additionally, highly relevant topics in today's work environment, such as ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance), CSR (Corporate Social

Responsibility), gamification, and Gen Z expectations, have mostly been addressed only conceptually or exploratorily (Khalid & Ahmed, 2023; Rogers & DuBois, 2024; Postuła, 2025). Few studies have empirically and systematically tested how these elements shape engagement in modern work contexts. Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to map these issues while offering directions for future research that are more contextual and evidence-based. The practical implications of this study are particularly significant for organizations looking to align their employee engagement strategies with the evolving expectations of their workforce. By examining the changing definitions, factors, and trends in employee engagement, this research provides organizations with actionable insights into how they can adapt their human resource practices to foster greater employee satisfaction, loyalty, and performance. Additionally, the findings will offer a conceptual foundation for further research, particularly in underexplored geographical regions such as Southeast Asia, where cultural and organizational factors may influence engagement strategies in unique ways.

METHOD

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. This method was chosen to ensure transparency, replicability, and rigor in the process of identifying, selecting, and analyzing literature relevant to the topic of employee engagement. The PRISMA protocol provided a structured framework for each stage of the review process, from identification and screening to eligibility assessment and final inclusion.

Literature Search Process

Articles were systematically searched through several reputable academic databases, including Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar, to broaden the coverage of peer-reviewed articles. The search period focused on the years 2006 to 2025, encompassing the early and contemporary phases of employee engagement development. Articles were selected based on recency, topic relevance, and their contribution to the study of engagement from various perspectives.

The search process employed the following combinations of keywords:

- a. "employee engagement" AND "factors" OR "antecedents"
- b. "employee engagement" AND "definition" OR "conceptualization"
- c. "employee engagement" AND "ESG" OR "CSR" OR "digital" OR "Gen Z" OR "hybrid work"
- d. "evolution of employee engagement" OR "employee engagement trends"

This search was limited to scholarly journal articles written in English, containing explicit discussions on employee engagement either conceptually or in terms of influencing factors, and published following a peer-review process.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the literature analyzed. Included articles were peer-reviewed scholarly journal publications issued between 2014 and 2025 that explicitly addressed employee engagement, whether conceptually, in terms of influencing factors, or in the shifting meanings within organizational contexts. Articles had

to be written in English or Indonesian and available in full-text format to enable comprehensive data extraction.

Exclusion criteria comprised opinion pieces, editorials, theses, non-peer-reviewed proceedings, and other grey literature. Studies that mentioned engagement only briefly without focusing on employee engagement, as well as those addressing unrelated contexts such as political participation or community involvement, were also excluded. These criteria were applied strictly to ensure the conceptual and practical validity of the findings within human resource and organizational contexts.

PRISMA Stages

The literature selection process followed the four main PRISMA stages:

1. **Identification:** A total of 245 articles were identified through systematic searches of major academic databases using combinations of keywords related to employee engagement. The search aimed to capture both conceptual and empirical studies from 2006 to 2025. All identified records were imported into a reference manager for further processing.
2. **Screening:** After removing duplicates, 210 unique articles were retained for screening based on titles and abstracts. Screening focused on relevance to employee engagement, eliminating articles outside the scope (e.g., political engagement or community participation). At this stage, 150 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion focus.
3. **Eligibility:** Sixty full-text articles were retrieved and examined in detail against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The assessment considered conceptual clarity, methodological rigor, and direct relevance to the research questions. As a result, 43 articles were excluded due to insufficient focus on employee engagement or methodological limitations.
4. **Inclusion:** Seventeen articles fulfilled all inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. These articles represented a mix of conceptual, empirical, and review studies that directly addressed the evolving meaning of employee engagement. Meta-analysis was not performed due to heterogeneity in study design, variables, and measurement approaches. This process was documented in a PRISMA flow diagram.

The data from the selected articles were analyzed using a thematic narrative synthesis approach, focusing on:

1. The concept or engagement approach applied,
2. Key factors influencing engagement,
3. Indications of shifts in meaning or engagement approaches,
4. Organizational, geographical, and methodological contexts.

All findings were compiled into a matrix table and synthesized to identify thematic patterns and research gaps.

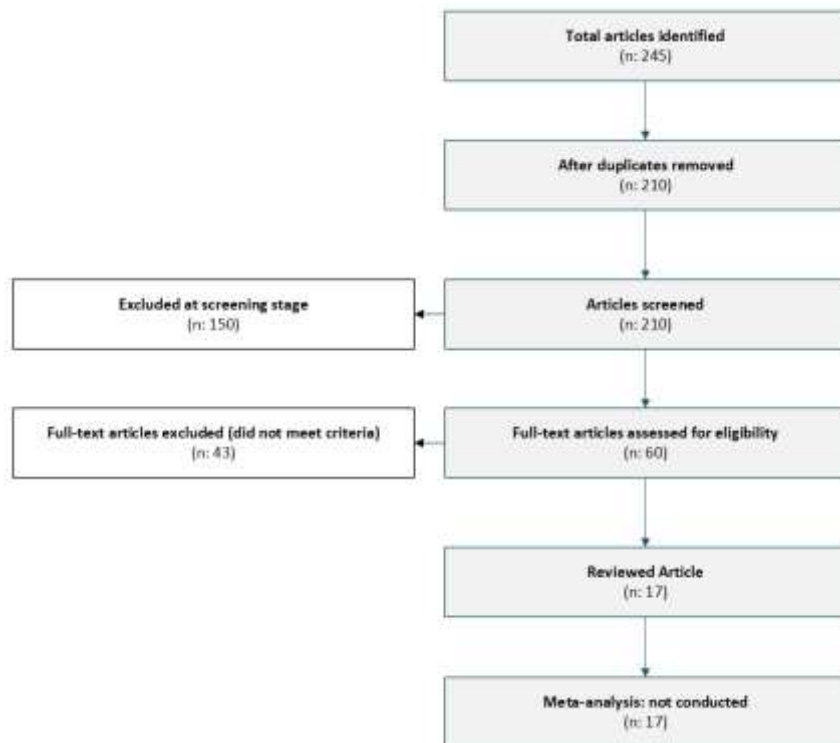


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

Source: Processed by the author using the PRISMA protocol (2026)

Data Analysis

The data from the 17 selected articles were analyzed using a narrative thematic synthesis approach. This approach allowed the researcher to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret key themes emerging from the literature regarding employee engagement. The analysis focused on three core dimensions: (1) the definitions and conceptual frameworks of employee engagement presented in the studies, (2) the key organizational, individual, and contextual factors influencing engagement, and (3) evidence of conceptual shifts or redefinitions of engagement over time. A coding matrix was developed to map these elements across studies, enabling the identification of patterns, consistencies, and divergences in how engagement is understood and operationalized in different contexts.

Throughout the synthesis, particular attention was paid to how technological developments, generational values, and sustainability principles (e.g., CSR, ESG) have shaped engagement narratives. The process involved iterative reading and comparison of findings across studies to ensure that the thematic categories reflected the diversity of perspectives captured in the literature. This thematic synthesis not only highlighted dominant trends but also revealed gaps and underexplored areas, such as the lack of longitudinal studies and limited focus on Southeast Asian contexts. The final analysis provided an integrative overview of how employee engagement is evolving as a construct within modern organizational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic synthesis identified four main categories of factors influencing employee engagement:

Internal organizational factors remain a fundamental foundation. Organizational support, procedural justice, trust in leadership, reward systems, and collaborative work culture were consistently found to have positive relationships with employee engagement (Mishra & Biswal, 2024).

Generational values, particularly those of Gen Z, increasingly shape how engagement is formed. Engagement is now closely linked to work meaning, sustainability values, and social contribution, indicating that involvement is no longer merely about financial rewards but also about personal value resonance (Lulewicz-Sas et al., 2024; Khalid & Ahmed, 2023).

Technology and modern work design have become significant influencers. In the era of hybrid and digital work, engagement is affected by accessibility, flexibility, and employees' experiences with technology (Agarwal & Gupta, 2024). Rogers and DuBois (2024) showed that gamification and digital systems can enhance engagement but may also risk digital fatigue if not balanced with psychological and managerial support.

Value-based leadership quality is increasingly prominent in determining sustained engagement. Studies such as Postuła (2025) emphasize the importance of moral authority and ethics in fostering long-term engagement, where employees feel emotionally and value-connected to their leaders.

These findings indicate a shift in the meaning of employee engagement. Engagement is no longer viewed solely as a static condition or as the outcome of organizational interventions, but rather as a dynamic construct shaped by context, time, and values (Bailey et al., 2017). Engagement approaches have shifted from normative and structural to more adaptive, participatory, and value-driven models. Thus, the concept of engagement in the modern workplace cannot be separated from an understanding of generational dynamics, digital complexity, and expectations for more human-centered and sustainable organizations (Ali & Khan, 2023).

The findings of this study confirm that the concept of employee engagement has experienced a significant shift over the past two decades. Initially conceptualized as a psychological state of employees—characterized by affective, cognitive, and behavioral involvement in their work—engagement has evolved into a multidimensional construct that is increasingly influenced by contextual, technological, and value-based factors (Christian et al., 2011).

One important finding is that employee engagement can no longer be separated from personal values and generational dynamics. The reviewed studies (e.g., Lulewicz-Sas et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Prabowo, 2023) indicate that alignment between personal values and organizational values plays a key role in forming sustainable engagement. This shift aligns with broader changes in work environments where younger generations expect greater meaning and social impact from their work. The integration of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) principles into engagement strategies is increasingly recognized as essential for meeting these expectations (Khalid & Ahmed, 2023; Rana et al., 2025).

In addition, the role of technology is becoming more dominant in shaping engagement patterns. The presence of digital systems, hybrid work models, and gamification strategies has transformed how employees interact with their organizations (Rogers & DuBois, 2024; Jindain & Gilitwala, 2024). This not only brings new opportunities for engagement, such as greater

flexibility and interactivity, but also presents challenges such as the risk of digital fatigue and the need for stronger digital trust.

The discussion also highlights theoretical gaps in the literature. Many studies still use classical models of engagement that emphasize individual psychological states or direct organizational interventions without fully accommodating the dynamics of modern work contexts. Although some studies have introduced participatory or value-based engagement approaches, empirical testing of these models remains limited. The inconsistency in conceptual frameworks and the dominance of cross-sectional quantitative studies reduce the ability of the current literature to capture the complexity and temporal changes of engagement.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this review imply the need for organizations to adopt more adaptive, value-based, and technology-integrated engagement strategies. Organizations should no longer view engagement merely as a tool for improving performance or reducing turnover, but as part of a broader cultural transformation aimed at aligning organizational objectives with employee values, sustainability commitments, and technological innovations (Priyono & Sulistyono, 2024).

This discussion suggests that future research needs to develop more holistic engagement models that integrate personal, organizational, and societal dimensions. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies are recommended to capture the dynamic processes of engagement formation, particularly in the context of digital work, ESG strategies, and generational value shifts.

CONCLUSION

This study synthesizes 17 articles published between 2006 and 2025, revealing that employee engagement has evolved from a primarily psychological state linked to job roles into a dynamic, multidimensional construct influenced by personal values, generational expectations, technological advancements, and organizational commitments to social responsibility. The findings emphasize that contemporary engagement is closely tied to employees' perceptions of organizational purpose, as well as the growing impact of hybrid work models and digital systems in shaping how engagement is developed and sustained. Theoretically, this shift highlights the need for more integrative and adaptive conceptual models that capture the complexity of modern work environments, while practically, it underscores the importance for organizations to adopt value-based, inclusive, and technology-enabled strategies to enhance sustainable engagement. Future research should focus on longitudinal and cross-cultural studies—particularly in underexplored regions such as Southeast Asia—to better understand how evolving workplace dynamics, cultural contexts, and emerging technologies interact to shape employee engagement over time.

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