Chapter 9
Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement for a Diverse Workforce

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ABSTRACT

In the recent years, employee engagement has become a hot topic of discussion among popular business press and consulting firms. This topic has created interest in various stakeholder groups ranging from scholarly human resource practitioners to policy makers or government agencies. The interest in employee engagement has progressively increased, however, in academic literature: the concept of employee engagement has been studied rarely and comparatively less is known regarding its antecedents and consequences. Recently, a number of researchers have argued that the challenge of engaging the employees is mounting. Although it seems to conceptually overlap with existing constructs, for instance, job involvement, organizational commitment, still some empirical research confirms that engagement is a separate construct. Therefore, this chapter aims (a) to shed some light in this respect by assessing the association between workforce diversity, specifically in terms of their age and employee engagement, and (b) to provide a variety of precursors and outcomes of employee engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of employee engagement is a relatively new one, one that has been heavily marketed by human resource (HR) consulting firms that offer advice on how it can be created and leveraged. (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 3)

In the recent years, employee engagement has become a hot topic of discussion among popular business press and consulting firms (Anaza *et al.*, 2016). This topic has created interest in various stakeholder groups ranging from scholarly (*e.g.* Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli *et al*., 2006, 2002), Human resource practitioners (e.g. Harter *et al.*, 2002; Masson *et al.*, 2008), to policy-makers or government agencies (*e.g.* MacLeod & Clarke 2009). On the one hand, the interest in employee engagement has progressively increased (Anaza *et al.*, 2016), however in academic literature, the concept of employee engagement has been studied rarely and comparatively less is known regarding its antecedents and consequences. Recently, a number of researchers' have argued that the challenge of engaging the employees is mounting (Fleming et al., 2005; May et al., 2004; Pech & Slade, 2006). Although it seeming conceptually overlap with existing constructs for instance job involvement, organizational commitment, still some empirical research confirms that engagement is a separate construct (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006).

As per a survey of 656 CEOs hailing from the countries across the globe, employee engagement is fourth significant management challenge, following reducing costs, creating loyal customers (Wah, 1999). Indeed, the Gallup Organization found recently that approximately twenty percent of US employees were disengaged and fifty four percent were successfully impartial regarding their work (Fleming et al., 2005). In addition, study conduct by Gallup and Towers Perrin (Seijts & Crim, 2006) advocates that disengage employee is equally challenging in other countries also. Thus, collectively the influence of these two trends - diversity in workforce and the rising challenge of employee engagement could prove problematical for various employers (Avery *et al.*, 2007).The work force diversity will increase the chances of different diversity present in most of the work settings.

Although researcher has connected work force dissimilarity to various outcomes for instance organizational commitment and intention to stay (Riordan, 2000), still the effect of this divergence on employee engagement is uncertain. Understanding regarding this association is important as (a) meta-analytic evidence and the other findings have revealed employee engagement to predict the key outcomes, for instance customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, employee turnover, productivity, safety, and profitability (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Salanova *et al.*, 2005), and (b) because employee engagement has a direct influence on performance, while the influence of job attitudes for example organizational commitment are indirect in nature (Harrison *et al.*, 2006).

Employee engagement has become a broadly used and famous term (Robinson *et al.*, 2004). However, majority of writings about employee engagement can be found in the practitioner journals, where this concept has its base in practice instead of theory and empirical studies. Robinson *et al.* (2004) noted there has been shockingly little empirical and academic research on a subject that has become so famous. Consequently, employee engagement has the emergence of being something called as, "old wine in a new bottle".

Several definitions have been provided for this concept in the academic literature. Initially, Kahn (1990, p. 694) firstly conceptualized work engagement or personal engagement or employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances." Rothbard (2001, p. 656) defines engagement as "psychological presence but goes further to state that it involves two critical components: attention and absorption. Attention refers to "cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role" while absorption "means being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one's focus on a role."

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002, p. 74) define engagement "as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." They further state that engagement is not a

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