



# Review Article on Theories and Drivers of Employee Engagement

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the theories and drivers of employee engagement in the public sector. Employee engagement has been defined differently by people. From all the different definitions the different aspects which are checked to check if one is engaged or not include employees' actions like attachment, commitment, loyalty, effort, and attitude towards his work. Employee engagement is an output based on the nature of leadership, nature and meaningfulness of work, work environment, development opportunities, policy implementation and communication among others. There are various theories like Job Demand and Resources (JDR), Socio exchange, leadership member theories and the Rights Organizational effectiveness framework model which explain the reasons for different levels of engagement in employees.

It is important for organizations to understand the drivers based on the models so that they in turn understand the reasons for the various levels of engagement in their employees and work towards improving them.

**KEY WORDS: Employee engagement, drivers, models, theories**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is very key to the delivery of services in organizations of all kinds. It is through the efforts of employees that the services which public institutions offer to the public are measured. Of all the different definitions of employee engagement, manifestation of employee engagement is through the employees' actions like attachment, commitment, loyalty, effort, and attitude towards work.

Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles –physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance. in

engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". The cognitive aspect of employee engagement concerns employees' beliefs about the organization, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about each of those three factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organization and its leaders. The physical aspect of employee engagement concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. Thus, according to Kahn (1990), engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organizational role.

Schaufeli et al 2002, defines employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to experiencing high levels of energy and mental resilience while working; dedication is characterized as feeling a sense of significance, pride, and inspiration towards one's work; absorption is characterized as being fully engrossed in one's one work. Robinson et al (2004) defined engagement as 'one step up from commitment.'

The Institute of Employment Studies (2007) defines employee engagement as 'A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values which is manifested by employee awareness of business context, working with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. Engagement is a two-way relationship between employer and employee and the organization has to work to nurture it.

Fleming and Asplund (2007) of Gallup, in their book, titled 'Human Sigma: Managing Employee-Customer Encounter' define employee engagement as "the ability to capture the heads, hearts, and souls of your employees to instill an



intrinsic desire and passion for excellence.” They further point out that engaged employees want their organization to succeed because they feel connected emotionally, socially, and even spiritually to its mission, vision, and purpose. Agyemang and Ofie S. B. (2013) define employee engagement as something given by an employee but benefits the entire organization which can be dedication, discretionary effort and being supportive to the organization’s goals and objectives.

Disengaged employees are always a cost to the organization. According to Osborne S. (2017) in United States of America, Disengaged employees typically cost U.S. corporations \$350 billion annually. This has a big negative impact because the money lost could have been used for the growth of the organization.

From the definitions, it may be argued that through engagement the employees express what is in their minds in relation to their daily work including happiness, sadness, contentedness, or displeasure. Employees may be considered engaged or not depending on the interpretation of what to be engaged is in the mind of the one rating the employee. There are drivers behind the levels of the engagement to their work. These drivers are also aligned to some theories of human behavior.

## OBJECTIVES

The paper aims at.

1. exploring some of the theories that explain the dynamics in employee engagement.
2. Identifying some of the drivers of employee engagement.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 THEORIES AND MODELS IN RELATION TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The theories guiding the research are Social Exchange and LMX (Leader – member theory). These theories focus on the reciprocal nature of relationships whereby both parties’ benefit from an activity done. These theories highlight that all parties involved in something expect positive results to their benefit and if the outcome is not or may not be what they expected the efforts and energies applied to the activity are reduced.

#### 2.1.1 SOCIO EXCHANGE THEORY

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1967; Homans, 1958) is predicated on the idea of reciprocation.

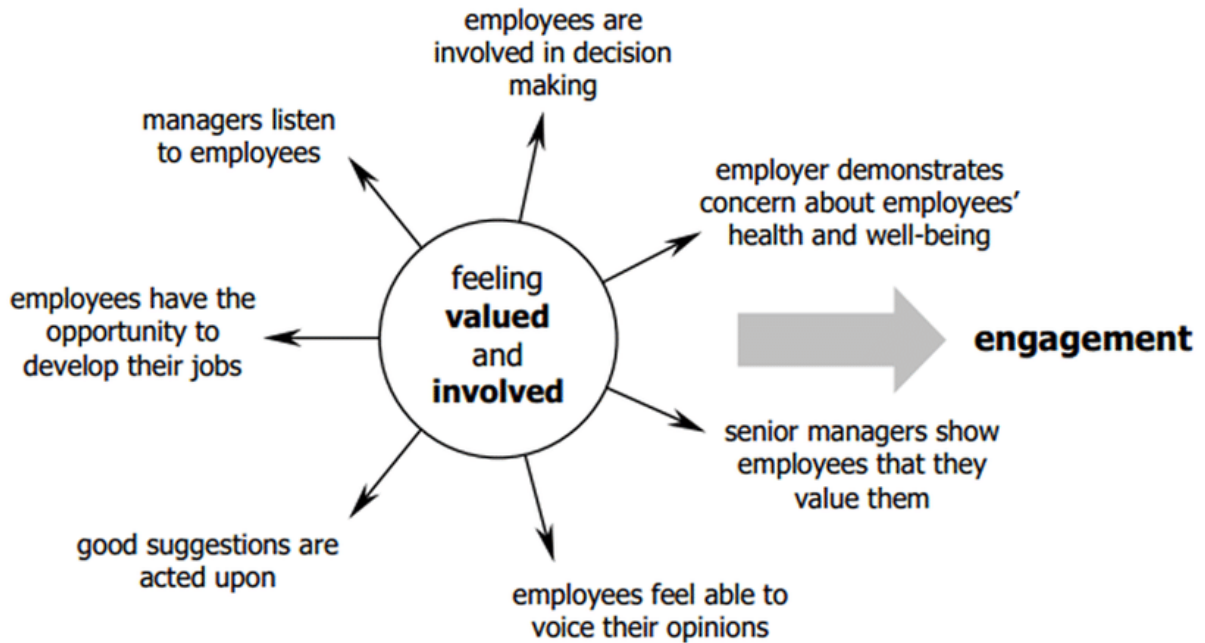
in relationships where individual actions are based upon a cost–benefit analysis, which theoretically explains the relationship between employees and organizations (Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002). From a social exchange framework, employees expect to be treated in a particular way (but to their benefit) by the organization and when treated in an unexpected manner it is reflected in their levels of engagement (Colquitt et al., 2013). Researchers in Gupta et al 2019 highlights that the organization is considered as an exchange system where social interaction of members consists of trade in of valued resources. The resources may include consumable goods, money, affection, attention and most basically information. This theory contends that social behavior is the outcome of an exchange, the purpose of which is to maximize benefits and reduce expenses (Saks 2006). According to Colloquit et al (2013) employees expect to be treated in a particular way and they tailor their actions based on this perception. Masterson et al (2000) highlights that the socio exchange is more linked to how employees perceive organizational justice and workplace relationships. Al fes et al (2013) adds that the employees who benefit from the organization economically, socially, and emotionally feel obliged to reciprocate. This means that the employees also give back by involving themselves physically, socially emotionally and even economically where possible. This behavior explains why and how engaged they are in their job.

#### 2.1.2 LEADER MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY

In this theory it is emphasized that the social relationship between workplace leaders and follower’s matter. One of the factors affecting employees is the manager- employee relationships. When employees are not in a good relationship with their managers, they may not engage themselves more. Kimberely B. et al 2015 highlights that the way the leaders reciprocate in meeting certain job demands by employees with additional resources like autonomy, information and opportunity to decision making process depends on the nature of their relationship. This resourceful environment increases the level of employee engagement. Shukla A and Chaurasia S (2013) suggest that when the relationship of employees with their leaders is of high quality, the employees’ level of engagement is also high.



### 2.1.3 ENGAGEMENT MODEL BY ROBINSON et al 2004



The framework above was developed by Robinson et al in 2004. It expresses that at the center of employee engagement is a feeling in the mind of the employee that he is being valued and involved. It expresses that once an employee has this feeling which may be reached through different experiences, the employee becomes positively engaged.

### 2.1.4 RIGHT MANagements ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS MODEL/Framework

This framework illustrates how important employee engagement is important to organization

performance and effectiveness. It places employee engagement as the center of organization performance, but it also highlights the crucial role of leadership in engaging subordinates in relation to aspects like strategy, culture, processes etc. According to Gyanwali S & Walsh JC (2019) the framework is comprised of seven elements (strategy, structure, capacity and capability, leadership, people, systems and processes, culture and value, employee management and customer experience). These key elements are the important influencers of Employee engagement which lead to productivity and profitability. The framework is presented as below.



Figure 2. Right Management's organizational effectiveness framework as presented by Syrijan Gyanwalis research paper -Influencing Factors of Organizational Performance in Nepal Airlines Corporation (2019)

## 2.2 KEY DRIVERS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The drivers of employee engagement are so many and vary from one area to another. The drivers may be financial or non-financial as highlighted in the models above. Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005 highlight that the drivers draw from the social exchange theory especially basing on issues of psychological contract that employees engage themselves with an expectation that they will also gain because of their action.

Some of the drivers identified by different research organizational justice in rewards and recognition, inspiring leadership/managerial style, communication, nature of work to be undertaken, meaningfulness of work being undertaken, consistency in policy implementation, training and development, teamwork, performance and appraisal, pay and benefit, health and safety, cooperation, and family friendliness. Madhura Bedarkar and Deepika Pandita (2014) highlight that career opportunities and brand alignment are the two top drivers of employee engagement in developed countries. In

developing countries, the drivers may differ in the order of ranking because of the different nature of work environment and conditions which may exist as compared to the developed countries.

### 2.2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE, REWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

Recognition, rewards, or appreciation are the expectations of an employee for his efforts when engaged with work. Bakker et al (2000) states that rewards establish a sense of fairness in reciprocity. He also mentions that employees feel that they are receiving appropriate recognition for their work, they are more likely to feel more mutually respected and appreciated and as a result, they will be more committed and engaged.

Kapoor & Meachem 2012; Al Maktoum 2015 states that rewarding schemes, in the form of pay, benefits, incentive, and honoring best achievers help to improve the levels of employee engagement. Mohammad R. S. (2016) conducted research on the influence of rewards on employee performance and found that employees' level of engagement increase





when they are rewarded using intrinsic, extrinsic and social rewards. This therefore demands management's serious consideration and implementation of the rewards policy to ensure improved engagement in employees.

Wang Xi (2020) and Bradler et al (2016), in their separate studies stresses that the implementation of rewards and recognition policies matters. It is only when rewards, recognition and empowerment are perceived as fair enough in the eyes of the employees, that they will positively contribute to the engagement of the employees. He explains that fairness in rewards and recognition enhances psychological functioning in the employees' minds and makes them see themselves as of value in the organization. In turn they positively engage themselves. John Purcel at an employee engagement summit in 2009 highlighted that those extrinsic rewards do not focus only on monetary value things like pay and promotions only. Wang Xi (2020) stresses what was stressed by Purcel (2009) that rewards and recognition should not only be of monetary value like pay and promotions. They may be in the form of gifts, a simple thank you, conference attendance, representing a company outside or written recognition like a certificate. Kumasey et al 2021; Strom L. D. et al (2014), Ohana and Meyer 2016 also agree with the words by John Purcel. Managers must understand that even without monetary attachment a person feels good and encouraged when his boss recognizes his efforts and rewards him accordingly.

Khan I et al (2013) conducted research on the role of rewards in employee engagement. The results showed a positive relationship but stressed that Financial Rewards are a greater motivation factors for the banking employees because through financial rewards the organization retain their most experience employees in the bank because when rewarded financially an employee feels his efforts are recognized and thereby ensures he puts more effort in his work. Despite these findings, Kulikowski, K. and Sedlack P (2020) found that in relation to JD -R theory, monetary rewards cannot impact on Employee engagement if no resources for the job are there.

In a study by Kilimo et al (2016) on rewards and employee engagement, he concluded that the most influential reward as a motivation driver is job security. Even in situations when the job pays a high salary, when job security is not there, employees may not be very engaged and may leave for a job with high job security even when it pays a low salary.

Bashir & Hassan (2020), and Kumasey, et al(2021) highlight that employee perceptions of fairness in rewards can increase employee engagement and reduce counterproductive and unethical behavior. It is therefore important to have recognition and reward mechanisms in organizations which are perceived as fair to the employees so that they do not disengage themselves from their work.

### 2.2.2 NATURE AND MEANINGFULNESS OF WORK

Hackman and Oldham (1976) defined meaningful work as the "degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile". When employees are aware that the work, they are to do is important they may engage themselves regardless of availability of resources.

Albretch et al (2021) conducted research on the relationship between employee engagement, job resources and meaningfulness of work. The final results indicated that meaningful work was more strongly associated with employee engagement than the job resources.

Kaur Pand Mittal A (2020) in their research on meaningfulness of work, employee engagement and affective commitment they found a positive relationship between meaningfulness of work, employee engagement and affective commitment. Further to the positive relationship, affective commitment mediated between meaningfulness of work and employee engagement.

Kushanova R. et al (2021) investigated and found a positive relationship among job meaningfulness, work engagement, and performance, including testing for a possible mediation effect of work engagement on the relationship between job meaningfulness and performance. On the other hand, task interdependence negatively moderated the relationship between meaningfulness and engagement.

Moustafa A. et al (2020) in their research found that work meaningfulness is important in public organizations as it serves as both a mediator and moderator of the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. Findings revealed that work meaningfulness partially mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and engagement. Furthermore, the positive relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement was stronger for employees who experienced lower, rather than higher, levels of meaningfulness.

Smith and Markwick (2009) state that nature of work undertaken, work that has



transparent meaning and purpose, impact on the levels of employee engagement. He further highlights that highly stressful jobs, jobs with no space (e.g. call center jobs, long working hours without a break) may make an employee not engage himself in his work. These jobs become boring at some point.

Van Loo et al 2018 states that it is difficult for public service employees to maintain their efforts and commitment to public service when they do not feel that their efforts are successful.

Bashir M. et al (2021) indicates that helping employees see and understand how their work benefits citizens and society can initiate and sustain their motivation and commitment because when an employee does not see the importance of doing something he cannot invest his energy in it.

### 2.2.3 LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF TRUSTING EMPLOYEES

There has been much research about the impact of leadership on employee engagement. It is clear from the findings that employee engagement needs to be driven from the top. In addition to this the senior leaders as the key influencers must be engaged themselves for the subordinates to emulate the example however, more senior and line managers in the workplace are themselves not engaged.

According to Robinson et al (2007) superior quality line management and visible commitment by managers at all levels drives engagement in subordinates. Gosh R., et al (2019) highlights that leaders need to lead by example because the employees emulate the example they portray and this either increases or lowers their levels of engagement. Juevesa R. D. and Pinaflor M B (2021) engaged in a study to understand the experiences of the employees in terms of job engagement as a result of their management practices in the workplace. They found that among others leadership by example positively impacts on the levels of employee engagement.

Bedarkar, M., & Pandita, D. (2014) conducted a study to explore the drivers of employee engagement. The results are that leadership is one of the key drivers to employee engagement, so leadership has a duty to ensure that employees are truly cognitively and emotionally engaged.

Popli S. & Rizvi I.A (2016) conducted research to study leadership as a driver of employee engagement. The results indicated a significant relationship between the two variables. Age and educational qualification moderated between the

two variables. The findings highlighted that a positive relationship exists between employee engagement and transactional or transformational leadership. It further highlights that a negative relationship exists where the leadership style is passive and avoidant (where leaders delay is acting to situations). Leaders need to watch their leadership style so that they contribute positively and constructively to employee engagement. The findings of this study are similar to findings by Storm L. D. (2021).

Popli S. & Rizvi I.A (2016) agree with Balakrishnan and Masthan (2013) that the way leaders treat the subordinate employees, and the trust subordinates have in their leaders has an influence on how the employees engage themselves in their work. It may either enhance or reduce engagement.

Wellins, R. C. et al. in DDI Monograph highlighted that a leader who is coaching for success, setting clear goals, empowering others, providing open and honest feedback, and making the winners feel valued and likely encourages the subordinates to be more engaged in their duties.

### 2.2.4 CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Kahn 1990 highlighted that communication is a key factor in ensuring employee engagement in the paper where he conceptualized employee engagement. According to AlMaktoum (2015), effective communication in organizations must be two-way from manager to employee and vice versa. Miller S. L. (2008) highlights that top management commitment to communication encourages employee engagement in different ways and makes them to be engaged in work.

Wang Xi (2020) corresponds to this by explaining that when the employees have accurate knowledge about business results, goals, policies, quality, and current issues they will engage themselves more as compared to situations when they do not have the accurate knowledge.

Saks, M. et al (2006) stresses that managers and supervisors have a responsibility to clearly communicate to subordinates what they expect them to do and the standard for them to help in realizing the vision of the organization. When there is poor communication, the subordinates do not know exactly what and how to do their work. They may do it the wrong way or not engage themselves to the required standards.

Choren, A (2015) in his research highlights that employee's awareness of the organization mission, vision and other things that happen in the organization has to be done through clear communication. In addition, the Rights



managements Organizational Effectiveness model shown above clearly indicates that managers are responsible for ensuring that the employees are aware of strategy, culture, values, systems, but also the mission and vision of the organization.

Moore et al (2019) in his research on leader's direct influence over subordinates behavior found that in effective communication may result in disengagement or low levels of engagement in employees and this can be improved if managers communicate with employees through proper channels. This agrees with Litvin et al (2018) findings that once the millennial employees know the reason for the task they are to do they engage themselves more so it is important to make them understand much better new tasks by using aids to communication.

Stephens (2021) in his study on how to engage Millennial employees found that for managers to communicate effectively to their employees and induce engagement, they need to tailor their communication to suit the nature of employees they are communicating with. They also need to coach and mentor the employees. These initiatives will ensure they understand properly and boost their engagement levels. This aligns with findings by Merriman K, et al (2016) that communication has to be tailor made for individual groups so that they feel important based on the communication they receive.

Mishra, K et al (2015) states that mutual communication between managers and employees increases feedback, decision making, and staff involvement and this in turn enhances employee engagement. Ruck W. et al (2017) highlight that Communication between the subordinates and the managers, but also amongst team members if clear, helps in ensuring that the employees are engaged since it gives employees a means of explaining their work-related challenges. Sievert and Scholz (2017) highlight that communication with managers and amongst team members can be through social tools in organizations. This internal communication makes employees feel valued and brings out engagement amongst them.

### 2.2.5 TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION

Senior and Swailes, (2004) describes "Teamwork" as the formation of a group of employees who cooperate with each other toward a mutual goal. Teams aim at supporting and assisting one another, often through complementary tasks.

Wanyeki M. N. et al (2019) studied the factors that were associated with the teamwork approach at the job environment and their

contribution on the employee performance and as a result overall performance of Kenyatta University. Findings highlighted that teamwork is closely related to performance and organizations must ensure that all team members are engaged for them to produce better results as a team.

Romero V. N. (2022) studies the mediating role of employee engagement and teamwork performance. There is an indication that since work teams provide a great diversity of skills, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes to face different situations positively, when people work in teams, they are successful in completion of their tasks. This success encourages the team members to work hard. Managers are encouraged to consider putting diverse skills in teams to enhance the individual contribution of the members to the team goals.

Ravikumar (2013) carried out research on the impact of team work, work culture, leadership and compensation on engagement level of employees in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India. The findings are that in high performance organizations, the individuals are committed to their teams, and they renew their commitment. This team commitment enhances inspirational work engagement.

Mughal M. U. (2020) studied the impact of leadership, teamwork, and employee engagement on organization performance. Findings indicated that Leadership and teamwork have a significant impact on employee engagement. On the other hand, he concluded that employee engagement does not have a significant impact on employee performance. It is highlighted by Kahn (1990) that when employees in teams trust and support each other the levels of employee engagement may be high. In teams where members trust each other, they shape each other, and no one fears carrying out tasks he is less competent because he trusts the team members will offer the necessary support to him.

Brunetto Y. et al. (2013); Bradler C. et al; (2016) the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship and member personality characteristics has influence on the quality of teamwork and levels of engagement. These researchers conclude that situations where individuals work independently without team support may yield less engagement as compared to teams' performance when doing the same work. The above findings indicate that the quality of teamwork may influence the levels of work engagement.



### 2.2.6 ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The policy implementation process impacts on how employees see their organization. Most effective policies and procedures are those that are carefully planned, reviewed, and implemented. They are created with a clear purpose, written in an unambiguous way, targeted to specific employees, communicated appropriately, and monitored for both attestation and adoption. Effective policy implementation encourages employee engagement.

Oliver E. Dzugbede and Asimah A. (2020) studied the design and implementation of organizational policies and their influence on employees' performance. Findings were that the process of designing implementation and review policies should be taken seriously by organizations because when employees are fully involved, the end result is high employee engagement which translates into high organization performance.

Chiemeke et al (2018) investigated the factors of organization policy that influence employee engagement. Findings are that Policy formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation affect employee engagement. It was further found that employees when involved in the different policy processes they own the policies and procedures and remain engaged in order to see the policy contribute positively to the organizational goals.

Anitha J (2014) in her research on determinants of Employee engagement and their impact on organization performance found that organizational policy impacts because policies display the attitude of the organizations towards their employees. It was further highlighted that policies must make leaders responsible and allow employees to contribute in their formulation because if employees feel not valued they do not engage themselves positively. Yousef (2017) agrees with the need to include employees to contribute to policy formulation since policies impact on the employees work life balance which further impacts on the Employees levels of engagement.

Kalokar, S.A. (2022) in his review of employee engagement literature highlighted that HR practices and policies impact employee engagement. As stated by Anita, J (2014) in the review by Kalokar (2022) it is stated that policies define the relationship between employee and employer. If policies are not clear they make employees doubt how the organization values them. It has been further highlighted that the policies have to ensure equal opportunities and fairness for them to impact positively on the levels of employee engagement.

### 2.2.7 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Training can be defined as the systematic acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that together lead to improved performance in a specific environment (Salas et al., 2006). Saks (2006) states that training is a strategy for employee engagement and makes an organization more competitive. Training boost confidence because an individual's skills are refined, and knowledge is improved or increased after undergoing some training.

Azeem, M. F. et al (2013) studied the impact of training on employee engagement by exclusively spotlighting Stress Management (SM), Error Management (EM), Ethics and Conflict Management (CM). The finding indicated that when employees are given the right training for the job, their skills and knowledge to perform the job are upgraded and improved. This in turn enhance employee engagement and improves performance. In addition to this, when employees are trained in other areas which impact on life like stress management, their levels of engagement also improve.

Manuel, F. D. et al (2014) researched on the relationship between Training and Development Employee engagement linking it with business performance. The findings indicated that there is a positive relationship between training and employee performance. The findings also highlighted that when a person is given an opportunity to go for a training apart from feeling valued by the organization, he has his knowledge improved. In turn the employee feels happy and more confident in doing his job much better. This in turn enhances the organizational performance.

Gupta, A. (2015) and Simha & Vardhan (2015) emphasize that professional development is a key driver of employee engagement. Cheallaigh, O. N. (2015), Sundaray, B. K. (2011) highlight that training/professional development equips staff with the essential skills and information to do their job tasks effectively. Karatepe, O. M. (2013) mentions that training helps the employees to rehearse as they improve their knowledge and skills and enhance work execution. Anita, J. (2014) adds that this encourages the workers to have more trust in their capacity resulting in positive engagement. Hughes, K. (2013) mentions that career development also encourages employees to put extra effort into helping the organization to achieve its goals. When an employee is nominated to undergo training which will help him do his job well, he feels that he is valued by the organization. This leads to





enhancement of work execution and increased employee engagement.

Chovarda, M. (2020) examined the potential impact of Perceived Training Opportunities and Perceived Investment in Employee Development in work engagement. The findings indicated that training opportunities positively impact employee engagement and organizational performance. She encouraged organizations to invest more in developing their employees so that they ably contribute to the productivity of the organization.

Sendawula, K. et al (2018) recommends that on-the-job training should be prioritized by managers because this was found out to be more associated to employee performance as compared to off the job training.

### III. CONCLUSION

Based on the literature, employee engagement is at the center of organization performance and leadership is responsible for ensuring that the employees remain engaged. The level of employee engagement determines the level of organizational success. Leadership decisions in relation to strategy, people processes and systems, and structures, capacities and capabilities determine the levels of employee engagement. Organizational Culture and values are also some of the key issues to be checked when trying to understand the levels of employee engagement in organizations. Culture and values explain why particular decisions on the drivers of employee engagement in the organization are made. This is clearly highlighted in the Rights model of employee engagement.

The theories of employee engagement clearly explain why employees choose to engage themselves or not. The socio exchange theory highlights that by nature, humans' beings expect something in return for their contribution either monetarily or not. This is emphasized by the drivers like rewards, policies, leadership etc. The Job demands theory highlights that if the employees lack the recourses and necessities which will help them to do the job it is unlikely that they will engage themselves.

The drivers of employee engagement like rewards, meaningfulness of work, leadership, teamwork and collaboration, communication and training and development contribute to employee engagement collectively so management has to ensure that the drivers are checked and balanced to enhance engagement of employees which will translate into better organizational performance.

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