

The evolution of employee engagement: Towards a social and contextual construct for balancing individual performance and wellbeing dynamically

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Abstract

Research demonstrates that high Employee Engagement (EE) sustains job satisfaction and performance among staff. This literature review analyses the evolution of EE, highlighting the theoretical frameworks used to explain the concept, the measurement scales adopted by researchers and the principal antecedents and outcomes relating to EE that have been progressively considered along the way. Three main findings emerge from the analysis. First, we highlight the social and relational nature of EE, providing a more sociological interpretation of this phenomenon. Second, we underscore the fact that EE is dynamic, and when combined with modern digital technologies, it can be studied through innovative approaches. Third, we discuss how EE could be a fundamental ingredient in shifting towards a human centred approach through which balancing individuals' wellbeing and performance. We discuss the implications of these findings, highlighting the necessity to rethink EE in relation to the new normal ushered in by Covid-19, and the increasing role of hybrid working.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, a number of scholars, primarily from the fields of psychology, human relations, organizational behaviour and management, have been closely analysing the topic of Employee Engagement (EE), together with its antecedents and outcomes. Research has shown that high levels of EE sustain individuals' job satisfaction, adaptivity and creativity (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Saks, 2006), leading to higher productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction, and also to lower absenteeism and turnover (Harter et al., 2002). Monitoring and promoting engagement are not merely key to enhancing the general wellbeing of a company's employees but can also

help in achieving organizational goals (Brauchli et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2011; Tims et al., 2013).

All these findings have to be reconsidered in the new normal brought by Covid-19, which is forcing companies and their employees to experience completely new working practices (Wang et al., 2021) and dramatic changes in the way of nurturing and leveraging on engagement (Liu et al., 2021; Ployhart et al., 2021). Several employees struggle in maintaining a proper work-life balance due to an intensification of work, which is affecting their psychological wellbeing (Prasada et al., 2020), fuelling distress, depression, and anxiety that tend eroding EE (Pirzadeh & Lingard, 2021). Other, however, reported some benefits deriving by hybrid work settings (Hu, 2020), highlighting

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extreme reductions in commuting times, and an increased time for family and leisure activities (Murmura & Bravi, 2021), which re-ignited their level of engagement (Pirzadeh & Lingard, 2021).

These mixed results suggest that we have to review the literature on EE in light of all these issues, presenting not only its state-of-the-art, but also proposing helpful indications for companies that try maintaining high levels of EE within hybrid working contexts. We have thus analysed the conceptual evolution of EE, together with its most relevant drivers and outcomes, the most widely adopted measurement scales and the most relevant theoretical frameworks used to explain the concept. Our work has led to three main contributions.

First, we propose to rethink EE as a social construction based on the role played by individuals within organizations. Partially in contrast with Bakker (2011), who suggest that personal resources are the main predictors of EE, our findings show that EE is strongly influenced by external variables, in the form of social interaction and organizational context. Through the analysis of the main antecedents of EE, we highlight three main conditions that permit developing an attachment towards the own job role and that are respectively social interaction, social exchange and social recognition.

Second, considering the dynamic nature of relational antecedents, we have put the spotlight on another and more dynamic formulation of EE. Although, 'most of the research conceptualises engagement as a relatively stable individual difference' (Christian et al., 2011, p. 94), recent contributions are increasingly focusing on the constructs of 'state' and 'momentary' engagement (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Breevaart et al., 2012). Building on Kahn's (1990) intuition that engagement varies not only between individuals but also within the same person, a recent debate in the literature has centred on a more dynamic conceptualization, and consequently, operationalization and measurement, of the construct (Breevaart et al., 2012; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Monitoring EE dynamically, especially through modern digital technologies, may enable companies to predict it in real time, allowing to foster it in increasingly turbulent settings.

Third, we suggest that if we assume a human-centred approach (rather than a performance-centred one) in dealing with engagement, we may bring advantages for both employees and companies. By analysing the outcomes that relate to EE, we show that engagement can impact positively on both the employees' general wellbeing and their performance, two aspects that several authors (e.g., Salas-Vallina et al., 2021) have shown to be in trade-off one against the other. At the same time, we show that there are two different apparently contradictory explanations of the relationship between EE and wellbeing. Some consider

EE as a dimension of wellbeing while others as a construct able to influence it. Our review highlights the lack of studies in which EE is considered a psychological dimension of wellbeing or in which EE is studied as a component of happiness at work (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018).

Based on our findings, we suggest several promising directions of research, addressing the dynamic, contextual relational and EE's double duty in relation to the hybrid work settings brought by Covid-19.

METHOD

In this work, the literature is analysed through a mixed methods research design, which combines the rigour, transparency, and reproducibility of a systematic review protocol with considerations of a more qualitative type (Tranfield et al., 2003), as it is perceived as best suited to our research objectives (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Data collection

Our research draws on Scopus and Web of Science, the most widely used databases in management disciplines (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Following Tranfield et al. (2003), we initially analysed the literature through selected search keywords and extrapolated the broad scientific areas covering the topic of EE. We searched through the articles' title, keywords and abstract, looking for the terms 'employee engagement', 'work engagement', 'job engagement' and 'personal engagement' (this last term being included as it had been used by Kahn in his first paper on the topic). We limited our research to articles, reviews and conference papers written in English, and we selected the subject areas according to multidisciplinary and inclusive criteria, founding 6869 documents from Scopus database and 7323 from Web of Science (search carried out on 25 January 2022). We included the following fields in our search: business and management, social sciences, psychology, medicine and economics.

The first relevant contribution to engagement was written by Kahn in 1990, and we thus looked for documents published from then onwards. From our analysis of the literature, interest in the topic has been rising fast since its conceptualization by Schaufeli et al. (2002), see Figure 1.

Subsequently, because of the extensive number of papers identified, and because our intention was to select articles with high theoretical and methodological robustness, we only took into consideration papers published in leading journals (ranked as 4 and 4* in the ABS Academic Journal Guide). After applying all our filters, we retrieved 420 documents from Scopus and 1034 documents from Web of

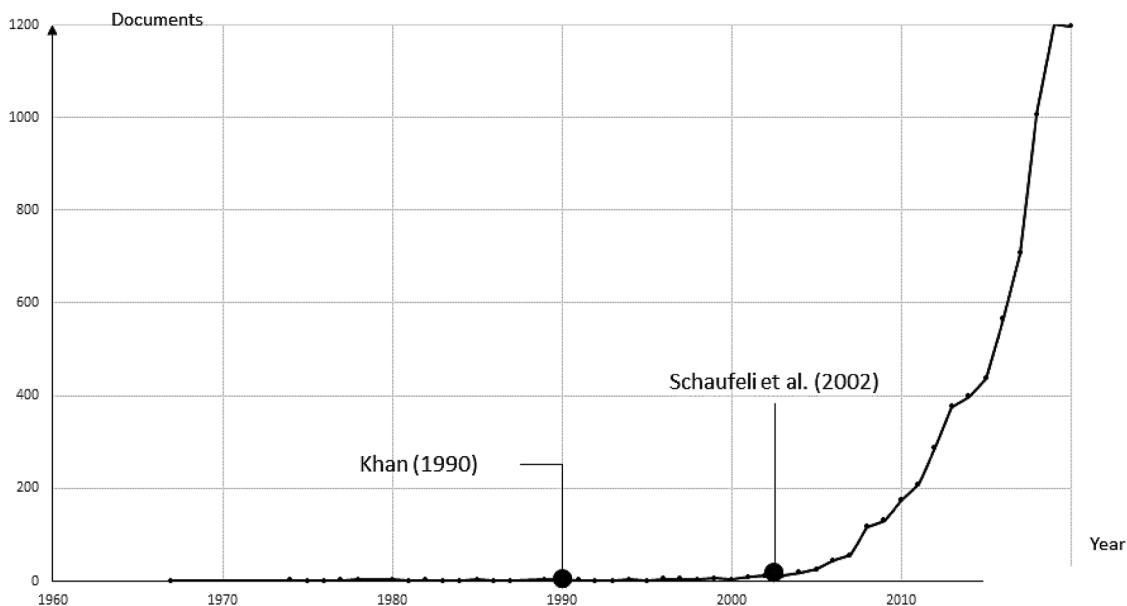


FIGURE 1 Documents in Scopus on employee engagement subdivided per year

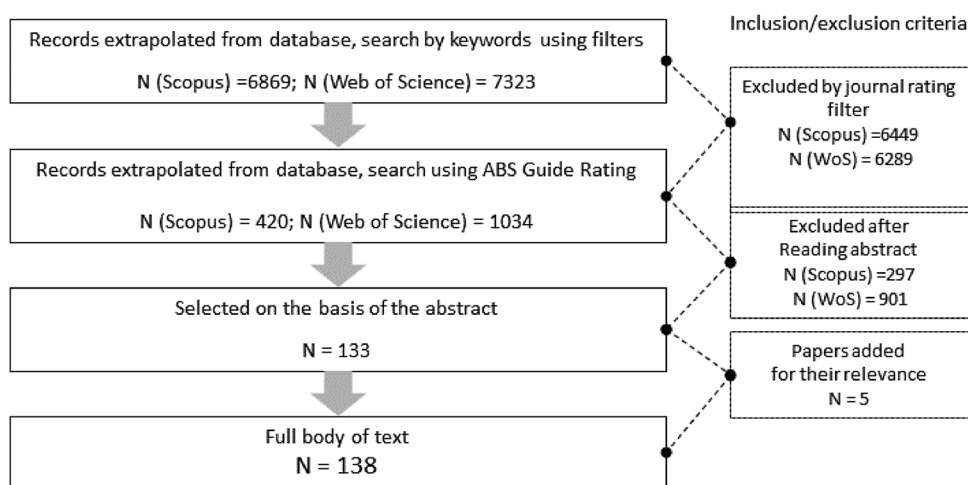


FIGURE 2 Systematic search path to develop the full body of text

Science. At this point, two independent researchers read the abstract of each article, to limit the scope of our review to works where EE was the central topic, and we obtained a final dataset of 133 papers.

After reading the first articles, we decided to add five further documents to our dataset, these being extensively cited and relevant papers that had slipped through the selection filters and criteria. One of these articles is the highly-cited watershed paper written by Schaufeli et al. (2002). The final body of text contained 138 documents, as indicated in Figure 2.

Content analysis

We began our content analysis with the first two authors reading a complete article, paying particular attention to its findings and discussion sections. Only statements focusing specifically on EE were marked as relevant. In constructing our coding scheme, we followed an iterative approach, and moved back and forth between our data and relevant theoretical frameworks (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Based on a random sample of 20 articles, we prepared an initial set of coding sheets to classify the current state of knowledge and

TABLE 1 Criteria used to classify the papers

<i>Main Information</i>	ID Title Authors Source ABS guide classification Year Citation Keywords Abstract Topic Journal subject area
<i>Definitions</i>	Definition of engagement
<i>Theoretical Frameworks</i>	Theoretical frameworks used
<i>Type of Study</i>	Theoretical Empirical Meta-analytical Qualitative
<i>Type of Survey</i>	Survey Daily survey
<i>Measure scales</i>	Measure scales adopted
<i>Dynamic Approach</i>	Daily work engagement Momentary work engagement
<i>Variables studied in relation to EE</i>	Antecedents Outcomes Mediators Moderators
<i>Additional Information</i>	Relevance to our study Notes

relevant suggestions for future research. As we analysed additional articles, we continued to fine-tune our coding schemes by collapsing, dropping, and adding categories.

The first two authors coded a subsample of 40 randomly selected articles independently. Based on this double coding, we found general agreement, indicating strong reliability. We discussed and solved the points where there was not consensus in our initial independent coding and established mutually agreed-upon definitions. The remaining articles in our sample were equally divided, as far as possible, between the two coders.

In order to gain a better understanding of the corpus of knowledge and summarise the material, we gathered information about all the papers using the module shown in Table 1. As indicated in the table, we gave each document a relevance value between '1' and '3', where '1' indicated papers concerned with EE as their exclusive topic of focus, analysed in relation with its antecedents and outcomes, while '3' was applied to all papers that touched on EE indirectly, for example as an outcome of other constructs.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In line with Figure 1, which shows increasing interest in EE, the papers selected in our review also show a growing interest in this topic, as shown in Figure 3.

On observing the scientific areas for the papers over the years, we can see that, while EE was initially mainly discussed in psychology journals, over the last decade, it has progressively been drawing in many authors from other disciplines, such as organizational behaviour, HR and management (Figure 3).

The differences between EE and other constructs are explained in Appendix A. In the reminder of this chapter, we have presented the various conceptualisations of EE that have been proposed through the years, the underlying theoretical frameworks and the scales adopted to measure EE empirically.

Conceptualisations

Table 2 gives a summary of the various conceptualisations for EE. Kahn (1990) presented the first relevant contribution, defining 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*'. According to the author, personal engagement is influenced by job features, people with whom the employee interacts and the organizational context. He also claimed that people so engaged show their own thoughts, beliefs, feelings, values and creativity in their job, adding that people engaged at work are defined by the dimensions of both self-employment and self-expression (Kahn, 1990).

In this context, self-employment refers to investing one's personal energies in work, while self-expression refers to manifesting one's own identity through one's job. On these bases, Kahn (1990) highlighted three psychological conditions necessary for achieving personal engagement, which are meaningfulness, psychological safety and availability.

Meaningfulness encompasses all the aspects tied to the job itself, including the features of the actual tasks required by the job position, the features of the job position and work-related interactions. Psychological safety relates to working and acting without being afraid to make mistakes, and the social norms and social dynamics between persons and groups; it consists of interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and processes, and organizational norms. Availability refers to personal energy, which can be physical or emotional, together with the individual's safety and outside life (Kahn, 1990).

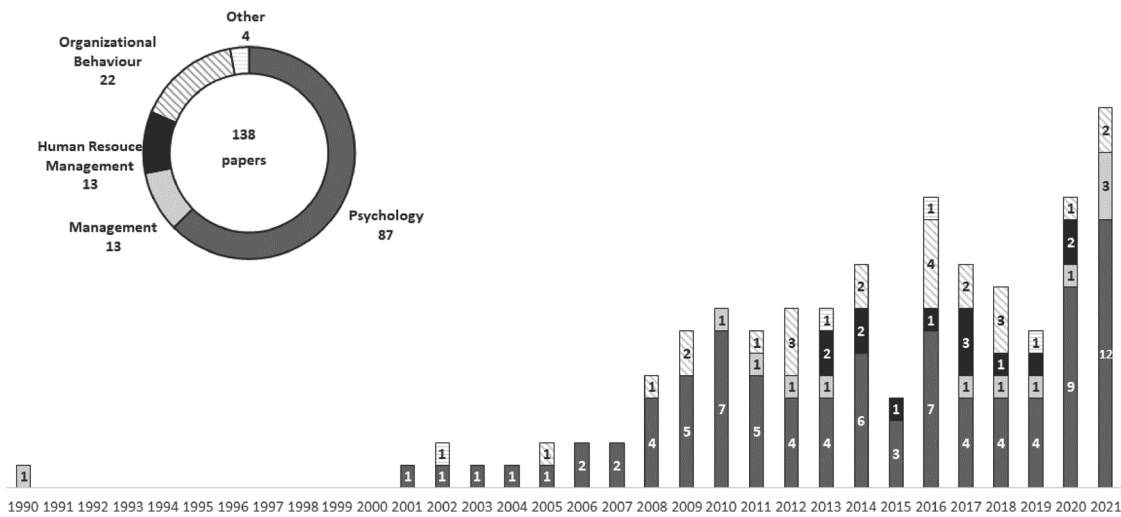


FIGURE 3 Scientific areas for the papers on employee engagement

TABLE 2 Relevant definitions of employee engagement

Source	Citations ^a	Definition	Key elements
Kahn (1990)	3092	The harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during in-role and extra-role performances	Personal engagement as the physical, emotional, and cognitive attachment towards the own job role. Three psychological conditions necessary for achieving personal engagement: meaningfulness, psychological safety, and availability
Maslach and Leiter (1997)	6464 ^b	Engagement is characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy, the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy	Engagement as the opposite construct of burnout
Schaufeli et al. (2002)	10 102 ^b	A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption	Engagement as a unique construct composed by vigour, dedication, and absorption
Saks (2006)	1692	A sum of job and organizational engagement	Engagement as the attachment toward work role and organization

^aOn Scopus on 1 February 2021.

^bOn Google Scholar on 1 February 2021.

After Kahn's seminal work, other scholars introduced several additional EE conceptualisations, framing each within a different theoretical background with different measurement scales (Christian et al., 2011; Shuck et al., 2017). Initially, engagement was studied in opposition to burnout. Maslach & Leiter (1997) defined EE as a construct composed of energy, involvement and efficacy, considering them as the three opposites of the burnout factors of exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy, respectively (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). In this view, engagement and burnout are studied and analysed as the two

sides of one coin, which defines the general wellbeing of employees.

In contrast with this consideration, Schaufeli et al. (2002) demonstrated how EE should be considered as a single separate construct, where engagement is 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption'. Vigour is characterised by high levels of energy, willingness to invest effort in one's work, and perseverance in the face of difficulties. Dedication implies enthusiasm, inspiration, awareness, pride and a feeling of challenge. Absorption is the quality of being

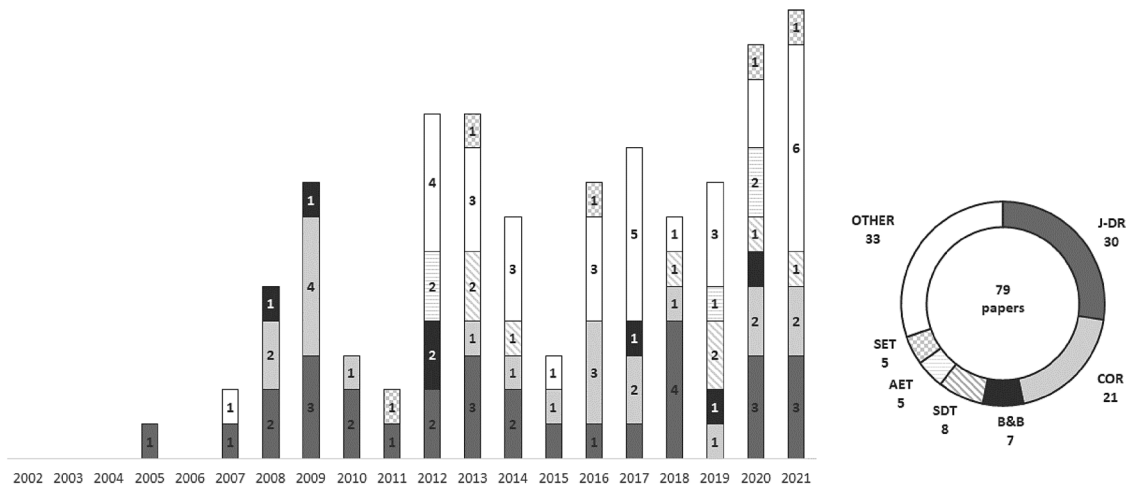


FIGURE 4 Theoretical frameworks used by researchers to study employee engagement

fully concentrated and focused on the job; time passes quickly, and people may find it hard to detach themselves from their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The literature review highlighted the fact that the model put forward by Schaufeli et al. is the one shared and cited most in the field of both psychology and management.

Later, Saks (2006) defined EE as a sum of two forms: job and organizational engagement. Job engagement is more closely associated to the individual and focuses on the features of the job and the person. Organizational engagement is instead more closely related to the context and the organizational structure where engagement is exercised. Saks noticed that the models suggested by Kahn (1990) and Maslach & Leiter (1997) explained only the psychological conditions behind engagement, but not why people respond to these conditions with different levels of engagement. To examine this aspect in greater depth, he grounded his definition in social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, Cropanzano et al., 2003).

Underlying theoretical frameworks

The construct of engagement often needs to be circumscribed within a theoretical background able to explain the relationship between its antecedents and outcomes. Hence, in this section, we have presented the most relevant theoretical frameworks that have been used to address the empirical studies on this topic, proposing a critical discussion on them. Looking at our sample, 57 studies on EE adopted only one theoretical framework, while 23 used several theoretical frameworks at the same time. As shown in Figure 4, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory was used in 30 papers, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory in 21, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in eight, the Broaden and Build (B&B) in seven and the Affective Events

(AET) and Social Exchange (SET) theories in five each. The AET and SDT have only been adopted in the last decade.

Job demands-resources (JD-R) model

Conceived by Demerouti et al. (2001), JD-R is the most cited and most widely used model to explore EE (Bakker et al., 2012a, 2012b; Brauchli et al., 2013; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Its remarkable popularity is probably justified by the fact that the JD-R model offers a holistic framework for analysing the relationship between EE and its antecedents/outcomes (Crawford et al., 2010; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a, 2009b).

Job Demands (JDs) refer to those physical, social and organizational aspects of work that require physical and mental effort and which are, therefore, associated with physical and psychological costs (Bakker, 2011). It has been shown that high levels of JDs can lead to exhaustion, one of the three dimensions of burnout (Maslach, 1982). Examples of JDs include physical workload, time pressure, recipient contact, physical environment and shift work (Bakker, 2011).

Job Resources (JRs) refer to those physical, psychological, social and organizational aspects of work that can: (a) bring to the achievement of personal objectives; (b) reduce JDs and the associated physical and psychological costs; and (c) stimulate personal development and growth. It has been demonstrated that low levels of JRs can lead to disengagement, while high levels support EE. Richter & Hacker (1998) identified two kinds of resources, those that are internal (cognitive characters and behaviour patterns) and those that are external (organizational and social resources). The JD-R model concentrates more on the external resources because they are more subject to change.

Of the 30 papers reviewed that have adopted JD-R, we observed that 15 have used the model properly, considering both JDs and JRs. Whereas the other 15 studies have included in their model only JDs or JRs. Many of these studies have analysed especially JRs in relation with personal resources and EE, and thus combining JD-R with COR theory (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a, 2009b).

Conservation of resources (COR) theory

COR theory claims that individuals seek to obtain, protect and maintain resources for the purpose of improving their wellbeing, especially when resources are depleted (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001).

Researchers often use COR theory in combination with the JD-R model to justify and explain the impact of JRs on EE and vice versa. COR theory has in fact tested and explained the relationship between EE and JRs. Hence, COR theory reflects the reciprocal relation whereby JRs have a positive impact on EE and EE has a positive impact in maintaining and obtaining new resources (Halbesleben et al., 2009; Matthews et al., 2014; Tims et al., 2013; Weigl et al., 2010).

In other words, these studies explain the twofold role played by EE. From the one hand, JRs stimulate the degree of EE; from the other hand, EE influence positively the obtaining and maintaining of new resources, thus creating a positive gain spiral at work (Hakanen et al., 2008).

Broaden and build (B&B) theory

B&B theory asserts that positive emotions can build personal resources, such as hope and self-efficacy, which have a positive impact on both JRs and EE (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). B&B theory is also often used together with the JD-R model to study the connection between some antecedents, like JRs and EE (Bakker et al., 2012a, 2012b; McGrath et al., 2017; Ouweneel et al., 2012).

B&B offers an alternative theoretical explanation in which positive emotions play a fundamental role in shaping and gaining personal resources, which in turn positively impact on EE.

Self-determination theory (SDT)

SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) explains how people's behaviours vary according to how self-motivated they are. It is possible to identify two broad forms of motivation, where

intrinsic motivation refers to when we do something for our personal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation refers to performing an activity for instrumental reasons.

In line with SDT, three basic human needs are essential to sustain and encourage motivation: the need for autonomy, the need for competence and the need for relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need to be perceived as the origin or source of one's own behaviour. Competence refers to the feeling of being effective. Relatedness refers to feeling closeness and friendship with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Employees must fulfil these three universal needs in order to experience engagement.

SDT has been used in several studies to explain how, by satisfying these needs, a person can attain a good degree of EE, for example through social interaction or job crafting (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Zeijen et al., 2020). In fact, different studies demonstrated that engaged employees are also those persons who perceive to be more autonomous, effective, and with good social relationships (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Zeijen et al., 2020).

Affective events theory (AET)

AET tries to explain how positive emotions can have an instant effect on the wellbeing of employees (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Events in the work environment can have an impact on the employees' emotions and this impact could, in turn, influence EE, as well as its antecedents and outcomes. Research has demonstrated that positive emotions have a positive impact on EE (Bledow et al., 2011; Ouweneel et al., 2012).

Differently from B&B theory, AET is often used to explain the impact of positive emotions on the type of EE referred to as state engagement, so it is suggested when engagement is studied from a dynamic approach.

Social exchange theory (SET)

SET explains how reciprocity is one of the most important aspects able to define the relationship between employers and employees (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2003). In line with this theoretical perspective, when one person treats properly another one, he/she may expect favourable treatment in return, leading to positive outcomes for both parties involved (Rhoades et al., 2001).

Coherently with SET, when employees perceive that their organization and supervisor take care about their wellbeing and concern, they return with higher levels of engagement (Saks, 2006).

A synthesis of the various theoretical framework

Considering all the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, we propose a critical discussion to underline not only their possible common points and differences, but also their impact on EE. JD-R, B&B, COR, and SDT explain how individuals are moved by personal traits and intrinsic needs in order to build, conserve and satisfy their psychological needs. Differently by the other theoretical frameworks, COR is widely adopted when engagement is studied dynamically. This consideration could be explained considering that EE produces positive gain spirals (Hakanen et al., 2008), as COR argues.

AET and B&B models are both based on positive emotions. Whether B&B highlights that positive emotions enable the obtainment or the maintenance of personal resources, AET suggests that positive emotions may be considered as consequences of the interaction with the work environment. In both cases, these positive emotions bring to higher levels of EE.

AET and SET are based on social interaction and socio-emotional exchange. When employees interact within their organizations, they exchange different resources that may be tangible (e.g., economic) or not (e.g., emotional resources and social resources). This exchange, based on social interaction, creates a state of interconnection and interdependence between the actors involved, which tends increasing EE.

However, this relational nature may be extended also to SDT. The basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), at the base of SDT, may require a social interaction to be satisfied. The need of autonomy, for instance, could be satisfied when your organization provide you more job autonomy and/or flexibility and, thus, when your company interact and provide you something. Otherwise, you may perceive to have competence when your organization and/or supervisor enable you to cover specific job tasks and recognise that you are able to do it. Relatedness is clearly connected with the social interaction that you can experience at work.

Measurement scales

As the concept of EE is fragmented and structured in different ways, several measure scales have been adopted. Within the scientific domain, the four scales given in Appendix B are the main ones used to assess EE.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), developed from Schaufeli et al. (2002), is the most commonly used scale, especially in the management field. Of the 119 empirical papers analysed, 87 used this scale (Figure 5).

UWES aims to measure the three dimensions of EE determined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), vigour, dedication, and absorption. The scale consists of 17 items, but the short version of nine items is often used, three for each dimension. Recently, Schaufeli et al. have also tested and validated an ultra-short measure of UWES composed by three items, one for each dimension (Schaufeli et al., 2017; 2019). Instead of applying the entire scale, the researchers in some studies decided to measure just the EE core, which is composed of the two dimensions of vigour and dedication, and thereby they used 11 items (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This scale is often applied to investigate the relationship between EE, its antecedents (for example JRs, such as job autonomy and social support) and/or outcomes (such as in-role and extra-role performance), in accordance with the JD-R model (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a, 2009b; Zhong et al., 2016).

The Job Engagement Scale (JES) is the second most widely used scale for measuring EE. JES was developed by Rich et al. (2010), and was used in 13 papers, of 119 analysed, to measure three different dimensions of EE, those relating to cognitive, physical and emotional aspects. Differently from UWES, JES is based on Kahn's original concept of engagement, and hence, focuses more on the job role, while the UWES scale is more general purpose and can embed constructs like organizational commitment, job involvement, and burnout (Byrne et al., 2016).

Another scale, used and known less than UWES and JES, is the Job and Organization Engagement Scale (JOES). This scale was built around the conceptualisation of EE in Saks (2006), where he distinguishes engagement into the two levels of individual (i.e., job) and organizational engagement (see section Underlying theoretical frameworks).

Within 'other' we included different measure scales mainly built around the conceptualization developed by Kahn (1990). For instance, Schuck et al. (2017) developed a more holistic scale, less widely shared than the previous ones, where they considered all the conceptual definitions presented by scholars over the years. The scale measures the entire job experience, and it includes three aspects of engagement, that is, emotional, behavioural and cognitive.

Few studies have adopted the Gallup Workplace Audit (Q12), developed by the consultancy services company Gallup. Q12 was designed as a management tool, and can measure different constructs, such as involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm, and the antecedents of engagement in terms of perceived job resources (Bakker et al., 2010). Thus, despite being often used to measure engagement, it is probably more suited to detecting general satisfaction among employees.

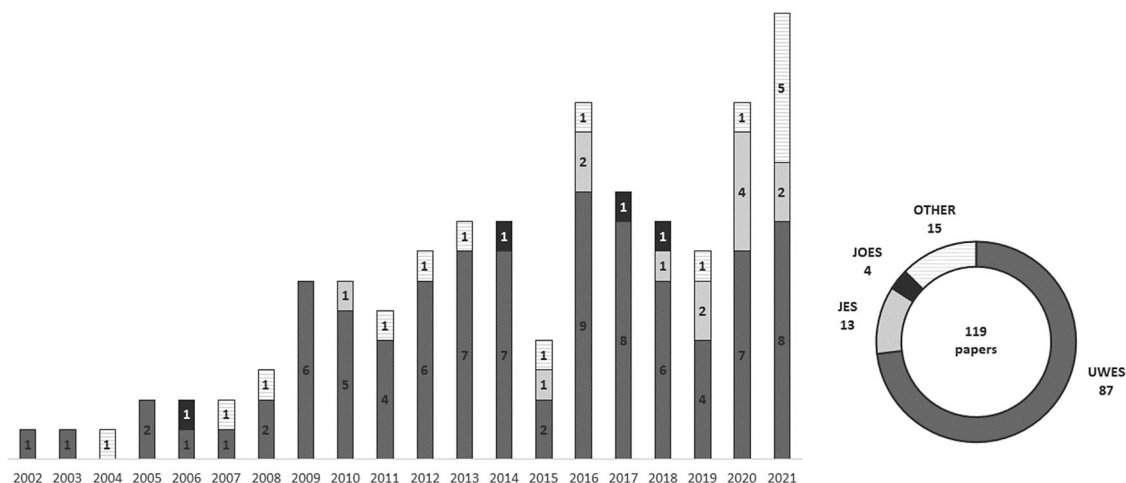


FIGURE 5 Measure scales adopted by researchers to measure employee engagement

ANTECEDENTS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL CONSTRUCT

Previous studies expanding on the relationship between EE and its antecedents (Rich et al, 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), classified them more or less explicitly into dimensions such as personal resources, job characteristics, organizational factors and social context. With this review, we intend to propose a more detailed and precise classification of the various antecedents of EE, and furthermore, we will also put forward a clustering taxonomy that can offer insights useful for upcoming research on this topic. Additionally, at the end of this paragraph, we propose a paradigm suggesting to reconsider EE also as a social construct, characterised by three main aspects represented respectively by social interaction, social exchange and social recognition.

In his study, Kahn investigated the psychological conditions under which people actively engage and disengage with their work, highlighting how these conditions are influenced by the actual context mediated by people's perceptions (Kahn, 1990). Starting from this intuition, we decided to divide the antecedents into two general macro-categories: endogenous variables, which are the perceptual factors that influence EE, and exogenous variables, which are instead the contextual factors that influence EE.

Additionally, as shown in Table 3, we divided these two macro-categories into further sub-categories, derived from our coding of the large number of antecedents during our analysis of the papers collected. We then split the endogenous variables into four sub-categories labelled personal resources, positive emotions, recovery and respite activities, and engagement (one's own or that of another person). The exogenous variables were instead divided into three

sub-categories labelled job characteristics, social relations and organizational resources.

By personal resources, we mean all the variables relating to a personality, psychological traits and aspects, and the way a person acts and 'is'. By positive emotions, we mean the emotions that affect an employee positively over the workday. By recovery and respite activities, we mean the actions people carry out during their workday and outside work. Job characteristics are aspects that relate to a person's job role, their tasks and duties. Social relations are all the variables that involve a relation between two or more parties. Organizational resources are aspects concerning the organization itself and the ways in which they impact on the employees' engagement.

In our dataset, 99 papers analysed EE in connection with its antecedents. As shown in Figure 6, 434 of these were concerned with variables linked to social relations and interactions; 30 focused on job characteristics; 28 covered antecedents referring to organizational aspects; 26 were concerned with personal resources; 11 covered variables regarding recovery and respite activities; and the last four were involved in examining positive emotions and the influence of engagement itself.

Social relations are all the variables that imply a relationship between two or more parties and can influence the degree of engagement. Many studies have been concerned with testing the impact of social interactions on EE, and it is possible to identify the various kinds of relationships that we are all involved in, including with our colleagues, with our leaders, with our customers, and with our family. All these kinds of relationships have an impact on EE. For instance, studies have shown that feedback from our supervisor has a good impact on engagement, and so do good relations with colleagues (McGrath et al., 2017; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008).

TABLE 3 Classification of the antecedents of employee engagement

Macro-categories	Sub-categories	Antecedents	Key references
Endogenous variable	Personal resources	Job crafting Hope Self-efficacy Proactive personality Organizational based self esteem Optimism	Bakker and Oerlemans (2019); Ozyilmaz (2020); Bakker et al. (2012); Xanthopoulou et al. (2008)
	Positive emotions	Positive affection Energy Happiness Enthusiasm Relaxation	McGrath et al. (2017); Ouweneel et al. (2012)
	Recovery and respite activities	Morning reattachment to work Being fresh and ready to go in the morning Workday respite activities	Chong et al. (2020); Sonnentag et al. (2019); Kühnel et al. (2012)
	Engagement (one's own or as influenced by that of another person)	Work engagement Leader's work engagement Husband's work engagement Wife's work engagement	Laguna et al. (2017); Gutermann et al. (2017); Bakker et al. (2005)
Exogenous variable	Job characteristics	Workload Task significance Job control Job clarity Job autonomy Time pressure	Breevaart and Bakker (2018); Rudolph and Baltes (2017); Brauchli et al. (2013); James et al. (2011)
	Social relations	Leader identity entrepreneurship Family-supportive supervisor behaviour Transformational leadership Colleague support Supervisor support Perceived line manager behaviour Supervisory coaching Work relationship Performance feedback Work-family interference Feedback Social support	Steffens et al. (2018); Yang et al. (2018); Rofcanin and Las Heras (2017); Schmitt et al. (2016); Breevaart et al. (2014); Siu et al. (2010); Schaufeli et al. (2009); Xanthopoulou et al. (2009); Xanthopoulou et al. (2008)
	Organizational resources	High HR performance Flexible work arrangements Perceived HRM practices Active learning Learning opportunities Career development Downsizing	Dlouhy and Casper (2020); Zhong et al. (2016); Bal and De Lange (2015); Alfes et al. (2013); Bakker et al. (2012); Hu et al. (2011); James et al. (2011); Siu et al. (2010)

At the same time, even relationships with family members can influence the level of a person's engagement at work (Siu et al., 2010). Many studies have focused on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, showing how certain kinds of approach, such as transformational leadership, have a good impact on EE, both directly (Breevaart et al., 2014a, 2014b; Schmitt et al.,

2016) and indirectly, for instance by mediating the relationship between the routine demands of one's job and daily engagement, as shown by Breevaart & Bakker (2018).

Coherently with the spill-over theory, people's work/social groups and more specifically, their work and domestic roles can influence each other and their level of EE, both positively and negatively, causing a

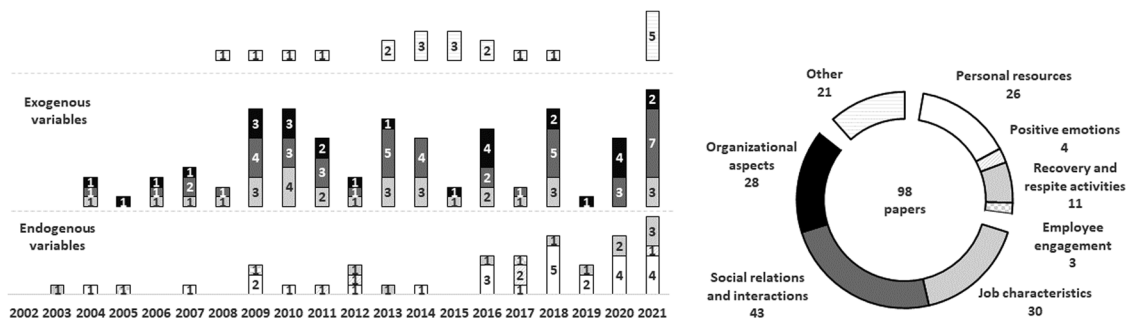


FIGURE 6 Relevant antecedents studied in relation to employee engagement

crossover effect (Bakker et al., 2005; Siu et al., 2010). Additionally, social relations can also cause employees to experience positive emotions, which have been demonstrated by researchers to have a positive impact on EE. This consideration led us to reconsider positive emotions, seeing them as the result of the impact of contextual variables on the interaction between two or more actors.

Other important antecedents that impact positively on EE refer exclusively to job-related aspects, and especially factors linked to a person's job or role, such as their specific tasks and duties. Research has shown that some job aspects like job autonomy and task significance have a strong positive impact on EE (Brauchli et al., 2013; Byrne et al., 2016; Hakanen et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Job autonomy concerns flexibility and freedom in managing our job (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a, 2009b); task significance is certainly associated to the job that we do, but it also involves other aspects regarding our values, beliefs and how we communicate with our organization and supervisor (Goštautaitė & Buciuniene, 2015).

By organizational resources, we mean the aspects concerning the organization itself and the ways in which it can impact on EE; these include all the actions implemented by an organization and even how these actions are perceived by the employees. For instance, some research has found a positive relation between rewards, transformational leadership and EE (Breevaart et al., 2014a, 2014b; Tims et al., 2011). Other papers have shown that, when people in an organization have a good perception of its HR policies (e.g., professional development and fairness and justice), this can induce high levels of EE (Alfes et al., 2013; Brauchli et al., 2013; Zhong et al., 2016). Dlouhy and Casper (2020) have recently shown that company downsizing has a negative impact on the engagement of the surviving employees because of the lack of supervisor support and personal development opportunities, highlighting how an organization's choices can reduce the degree of engagement. These considerations pressed home the point that organizations have a real impact on EE, both directly, through their actions, and indirectly, through their employees' percep-

tion of the organization's role (Alfes et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Zhong et al., 2016). We also realised that organizations play an important role in determining the degree of EE within their confines through the policies and actions they implement to support their employees in their journey within the organization itself.

By personal resources, we mean the traits that belong to a human being's personality and experience. Previous literature reviews (e.g., Bakker 2011; Knight et al., 2017) and several papers have underlined the fact that internal variables, such as personal resources, are important in EE, focusing on how human psychological makeup comes into play in determining EE itself. Studies have shown that some personal resources can impact on JRs positively, and directly or indirectly, also on EE. Three of the personal resources that have been studied most extensively in relation to EE (Weigl et al., 2010; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009a, 2009b) are self-efficacy (i.e., people's beliefs about their ability to control events that affect their lives; Bandura & Wood, 1989), organizational-based self-esteem (i.e., the employees' beliefs that they can satisfy their needs by taking on various roles within the organization; Pierce et al., 1989) and optimism (i.e., the tendency to believe that the outcomes of events or experiences will generally be positive; Scheier et al., 1994). The latest research focuses on job crafting, intended as the capability of employees to rebuild and rethink their own jobs, as an antecedent of EE (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Tims et al., 2013). Job crafting is also influenced by personal resources such as having a proactive attitude, meaning that people are more likely to act autonomously and so find their work more enjoyable and satisfying, thus also improving this side of their life.

Recovery and respite activities refer to actions that people carry out during their workday and outside work. In several studies, it has been demonstrated that detachment from work, attainable by switching off and recovering overnight, or taking days off and holidays, can prevent burnout and also encourage EE (Kühnel et al., 2009; Sonnentag, 2003). Even taking breaks or practising some sort of respite activity during the workday, mindfulness

for instance, can impact positively on a person's level of engagement (Chong et al., 2020).

Last, positive variables, such as positive emotions and engagement with work itself (one's own or that of another person) can have a positive impact on EE. Positive emotions such as happiness, enthusiasm, relaxation and vitality (which can be influenced by endogenous and exogenous factors alike) have a positive impact on engagement (Ouweneel et al., 2012). Positive emotions are analysed in the research field that studies engagement using a dynamic approach; emotions can have an instant impact and thus influence a person's engagement with their work on a daily basis. Gutermann et al. (2017) have demonstrated that engagement that initiates from the supervisor can then affect the supervisees' engagement positively; while Bakker et al. (2005) studied and showed that a relationship of reciprocal influence exists between a person's own degree of engagement and that of their partner.

Summarizing, although endogenous variables, such as personal resources, are fundamental in determining whether and how far employees are engaged, our literature review highlights the strong impact that exogenous variables have on EE, emphasizing the importance of social, relational and organizational variables in determining engagement.

These results suggest to reconsider EE from a more relational viewpoint, adopting a sociological lens. In fact, if most studies have investigated EE from a pure psychological perspective, partially ignoring the social implications related to it, Kahn (1990) developed his original conceptualisation of engagement around the work of Goffman (1959), a sociologist who analysed how individuals play a determinate social role that change in relation to whatever institution in which they act (Goffman, 1961).

In line with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and SET (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we propose to reconsider EE as a social construct based on social interaction, exchange and recognition.

First, we propose social interaction as essential condition to foster EE. Considering EE as the result of the impact of more exogenous than endogenous variables, we (re)discover the pivotal role played by social interactions in explaining it. Even if we focus on endogenous variables, as personal resources or positive emotions, these one need an interaction with someone in order to manifest their impact on EE. For instance, self-esteem or self-efficacy are subjective processes that need a context and a plurality of individuals to be defined. In these cases, the subjective evaluation may be influenced by social context, which permit comparing individuals with others, and which in turn lead to define how individuals are not only able to do something, but also may consider themselves. Even emotions are affected by social context. Indeed, they are almost

always generated through a social interaction with someone or somewhat. The interaction with the social context permit to experience different emotions, which lead to be more or less engaged.

Second, and in line with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and SET (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we suggest that social exchange in another fundamental condition to foster EE. When an organization and supervisor offer support to their collaborators, they show to take care about their feeling and concerns. In turn, this support will lead individual to answer with high levels of engagement (Saks, 2006). Furthermore, when employees interact with their colleagues and/or supervisor they can experience positive emotions and they can influence positively other individual to experience positive emotions as well. In this sense, social interaction with other individuals facilitates also the exchange of positive emotions between employees.

Third, we suggest that social recognition may be considered as another relevant condition to promote EE. We noticed that almost all the factors analysed in relation to EE requires a social recognition in terms of identity. In line with Kahn (1990), we can consider engagement as the attachment towards the own job role. But this attachment towards a specific role needs to be perceived by society, which has to recognise the identity role played by the individual (Goffman, 1959).

A DYNAMIC VIEW OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The second contribution of this literature review is to emphasise the fact that EE is dynamic. Academics and practitioners previously considered and measured engagement in a static way. Our results, however, show that EE is increasingly being studied using a dynamic approach, denoting a recent shift from between-person to within-person focus (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Breevaart et al., 2012, 2014a, 2014b).

Starting from the definition proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), state engagement has been variously described as a transient, positive, fulfilling and work-related state of mind, which fluctuates within people over a short period of time (Sonnentag et al., 2010a, 2010b), and is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Breevaart et al., 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Recently, two papers have introduced the concept of momentary engagement. Zeijen et al. (2020) studied the day-by-day relationship between social support and EE by measuring EE twice during the workday, while Bakker and Oerlemans (2019) investigated the possible mechanisms involved in the link between daily job crafting and daily EE, and put forward a dynamic concept, in the

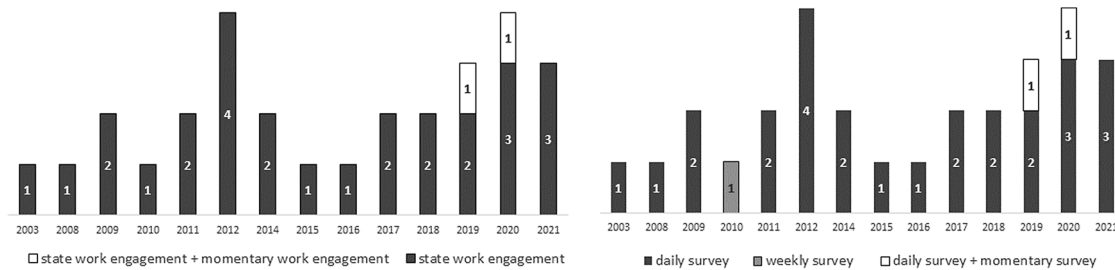


FIGURE 7 Empirical studies where employee engagement was analysed in a dynamic way

form of momentary engagement (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019). The main premise for momentary engagement is that it should be measured at various moments during the workday, specifically when starting and concluding particular tasks (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019). Kahn (1990) had already realized that employees may show different levels of engagement from one moment to the next, and his ‘... specific concern was the moments in which people bring themselves into or remove themselves from particular task behaviours... people are constantly bringing in and leaving out various depths of their selves during the course of their workdays. They do so to respond to the momentary ebbs and flows of those days’. From this viewpoint, it is possible to think of state engagement as the sum of several momentary engagements that make up the whole day.

Momentary work engagement should not be confused with the concept of flow, which refers to a mental state in which a person is fully immersed and fully involved in performing some activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow shares with momentary work engagement only the cognitive dimension of absorption and not the ones of vigour and dedication (Bakker et al., 2010).

Our literature review confirms that, when researchers study state engagement, they use the short version of the UWES scale (nine items), adapting the questions to a day-by-day format and asking the sample to complete daily survey-dairies (Bakker & Oerlemans 2019; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Breevaart et al., 2014a, 2014b; Sonnentag et al., 2019). Breevaart et al. (2012) (2012b) tested and validated the effectiveness of the short version of UWES in measuring state engagement. They observed that only one item relating to the dimension of vigour seemed to lose effectiveness (‘When I got up this morning, I felt like going to work’), probably because it was tied to a single moment of the day which is influenced by the level of EE of the previous day (Breevaart et al. (2012). Their research made use of a multilevel factorial analysis to test the effectiveness of the scale.

As shown in Figure 7, 29 of the papers analysed studied EE from a dynamic perspective, especially when investigating how certain antecedents can affect engagement day-by-day.

Even in this case, as presented in Figure 8, the variables relating to social interactions were those investigated the most (11 papers covered EE in relation to its antecedents), followed by the variables concerning recovery and respite activities (six papers). If we take into consideration antecedents such as social relations, positive emotions and recovery and respite activities, we can observe that all these variables express themselves in a specific moment during the day. Thus, time becomes a crucial aspect in determining the degree of EE in a specific moment.

We can experience different emotions through social interactions, which can dynamically modify the degree of engagement of each of us as individuals. A more dynamic concept of engagement takes place in this setting. On the one side, it is shaped by state work engagement, which measures the daily level of work engagement; on the other, it is shaped by the more recent concept of momentary work engagement, which measures the level of engagement in a given moment in time, and/or when performing specific tasks or operations during the day.

In line with the previous findings, the focus of attention in studies with a dynamic perspective of EE was on analysing the relationship between EE and (in-role and extra-role) performance (four and two papers, respectively, as shown in Figure 9).

EE refers mainly to personal traits and it concerns a more static conceptualization of engagement, which takes place between persons. Furthermore, state engagement presents a more dynamic overview of engagement, as its aim is to investigate the fluctuations that occur every day within a human being (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019; Sonnentag et al., 2010a, 2010b). In other words, while the first proposal was concerned with inter-individual differences, state engagement is focused on intra-individual differences in EE. This shift from a between-person to a within-person approach represents a crucial change in EE studies. State engagement is no longer considered as an enduring state alone, but also as a transactional state, which can be affected by many factors in the short term (Breevaart et al., 2014a, 2014b; Sonnentag et al., 2010a, 2010b).

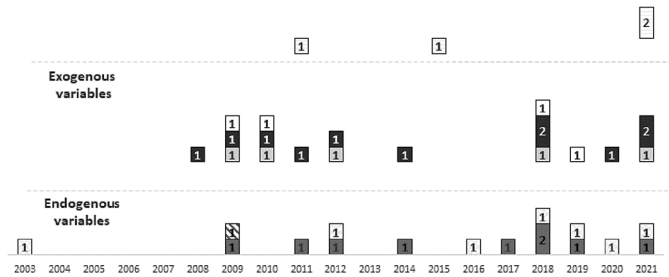


FIGURE 8 Relevant antecedents studied in relation to state engagement

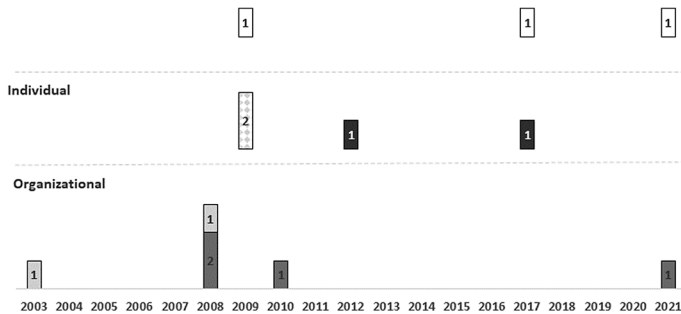
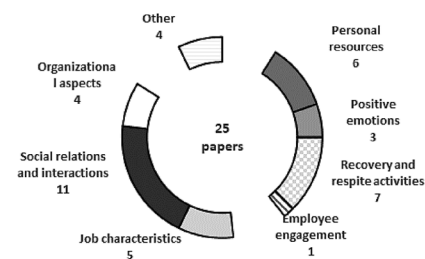
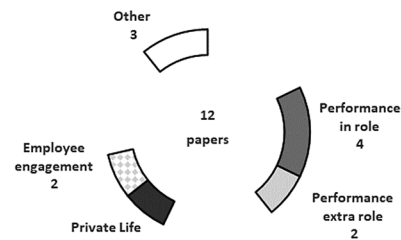


FIGURE 9 Relevant outcomes studied in relation to state work engagement



Researchers investigating state engagement use AET in addition to the JD-R model, providing their theoretical contributions to explain how certain emotions can have an impact in a specific moment of the day and so influence/modify EE.

The dynamic perspective on EE could be very helpful, especially for companies that intend to tackle and improve it in the new hybrid normal brought by Covid-19. This approach may enable companies to effectively predict EE, setting targeted actions in order to foster the wellbeing of their employees within increasing turbulent settings, overpassing for instance the use of traditional annual surveys.

OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND WELLBEING

Kahn (1992) suggested that EE can lead to both individual outcomes (i.e., quality of people's work), and organizational-level outcomes (i.e., growth and productivity). Starting from this idea, we decided to divide EE outcomes into two broad categories, where the organization category refers to variables that impact on organizations, above all their performance, and the individual category refers to variables that impact on people and on the wellbeing of employees.

Additionally, as shown in Table 4, we divided these two broad categories into a further eight sub-categories, starting from the process of coding that helped us to classify the large number of outcomes during the phase when we collected papers and analysed them. We thus divided the organizational variables into five sub-categories, specifically in-role performance, extra-role performance, organizational commitment, intention to quit, and turnover intention. We divided the individual variables into three sub-categories, specifically job satisfaction, private life and engagement (one's own and that of one's colleagues and/or partner). In line with Grant et al. (2017), these three sub-categories can also relate to two dimensions of wellbeing, the psychological side (through job satisfaction and work engagement) and the relational side (through private life). From our review, it would appear that the relationship between EE and physical wellbeing as of this time had not been studied in any of the papers selected.

Our dataset contains 58 papers where EE was analysed in relation to its outcomes. As shown in Figure 10 for these 58 papers, the relationship between EE and in-role and extra-role performance was examined in greater depth in 23 and 14 papers, respectively; job satisfaction in six; private life and the lowering of turnover intention was examined in five of them; the impact of engagement on engagement (one's own and that of another person) was analysed in four; and last, three papers investigated the relationship between EE and organizational commitment,

TABLE 4 Classification of the outcomes of employee engagement

Macro-categories	Sub-categories	Outcomes	Key references
Organizational	In-role performance	Task performance	Ozyilmaz (2020); Gutermann et al. (2017); Schmitt et al. (2016); Zhong et al. (2016); Bakker et al. (2012); Bakker et al. (2010)
		Core job performance	
		In-role performance	
		Perceived job performance	
	Extra-role performance	Proactive work behaviour	Ozyilmaz (2020); Schmitt et al. (2016); Zhong et al. (2016); Alfes et al. (2013); Xanthopoulou et al. (2008); Hakanen et al. (2008)
		Organizational citizenship behaviour	
		Personal initiative	
Organizational commitment	—	Hu et al. (2011)	
Intention to quit	—	Zhong et al. (2016)	
Turnover intention	—	Steffens et al. (2018); Gutermann et al. (2017); Shantz et al. (2016)	
Individual	Job satisfaction	—	Yeh (2013); Tims et al. (2013)
	Private life	Life satisfaction	Salmela-Aro and Upadyaya (2018); Ilies et al. (2017); Culbertson et al. (2012); Halbesleben et al. (2009)
		Work-family facilitation	
		Work interference with family	
Family satisfaction			
Engagement (in relation to and affected by colleagues and/or partner)		Subordinate's work performance	Rofcanin and Las Heras (2017)

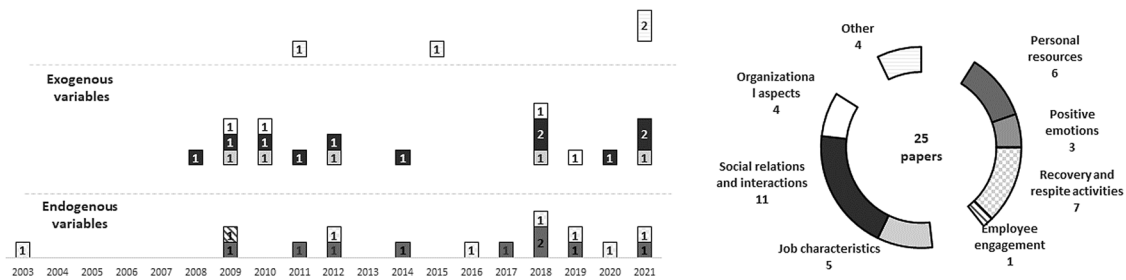


FIGURE 10 Relevant outcomes studied in relation to employee engagement

and between EE and the lowering of the intention to quit, respectively.

When researchers address the relationship between EE and its outcomes, they mainly focus on final performance. Empirical studies have demonstrated that EE enhances the employees' individual in-role performance, a factor that brings benefits to both individuals and organizations (Bakker, 2011; Bakker et al., 2012a, 2012b; Byrne et al., 2016; Ozyilmaz, 2020; Rich et al., 2010). Furthermore, it has been shown that EE has a relevant impact on extra-role performance, such as organizational citizenship behaviour (Rich et al., 2010; Zhong et al., 2016). Compared to in-role performance, which includes actions directed towards the accomplishment of tasks required by one's job, extra-role

performance refers to a series of discretionary behaviours, which are not part of a person's employment agreement. Studies have shown that EE favours these kinds of proactive behaviours, and these, in turn, have an important impact on achieving personal and organizational work goals (Rich et al., 2010; Sonnentag, 2003; Zhong et al., 2016).

Several studies have shown that a positive engagement experience can result in people seeing their jobs as more satisfying (Haynie et al., 2016). Job satisfaction involves employees' evaluating their jobs in a positive or negative light, and this differs from EE, as has been demonstrated (Christian et al., 2011). Several researchers have also explained that EE could have a positive or neg-

ative impact on a person's private life, often encouraging and helping people to achieve a good level of satisfaction even in their own private settings (Bakker et al., 2005).

Work organizations may in some cases be affected by turnover intention, causing problems to existing teams and their work, increasing the organization's unattractiveness and involving significant costs (e.g., in time and effort, as they need to employ new people and train them up), thus causing companies to lower their productivity (Steffens et al., 2018). In this situation, various studies have demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between EE and a reduction in turnover intention (Gutermann et al., 2017; Steffens et al., 2018).

As mentioned, several studies have focused their attention on engagement as an antecedent of itself, but other papers have demonstrated that engagement could also be considered as an outcome. Engagement can in fact influence and enhance the engagement of a person's colleagues or partner, highlighting that it can have a double impact both within and without the work context (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009). This means that EE can be transferred from one person to another, as if it were contagious, creating a spiral effect.

Simultaneously, it has been demonstrated that EE reduces a person's intention to quit, with benefits for the entire work organization (Zhong et al., 2016). In accordance with the JD-R model, EE can help people to acquire new resources, and thus, establish a reciprocal relationship between JRs and engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Weigl et al., 2010). Research has also been able to show that EE could have an impact on private life, both positive and negative, and can influence and enhance the engagement of a person's own colleagues and/or partner (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009).

Several papers analysed the positive impact of engagement on organizational commitment, which positively affects the general wellbeing of employees and achievement of the organization's objectives (Byrne et al., 2016; Saks, 2006; Tims et al., 2013; Yeh 2013). Simultaneously, it has been demonstrated that EE reduces an employee's intention to quit, with benefits for organizations (Saks, 2006; Zhong et al., 2016). Our results have shown that most studies are concerned with investigating the impact of EE at the organizational level, and more specifically, on both in-role and extra-role performance. At the same time, we observed that engagement has a positive impact on organizational commitment and can reduce turnover intention and intention to quit. These outcomes could help organizations to achieve their goals and lessen the relative costs. EE, however, has a positive influence on job satisfaction, on

engagement itself and can also influence a person's private life outside work, indicating that EE can even influence some dimensions related to employee wellbeing.

Our review also demonstrated two different perspectives, apparently in contradiction, on the relationship between EE and wellbeing. Some studies (Fida et al., 2022; Van Dorseen et al., 2021) considered EE as an antecedent of wellbeing, whereas others considered EE, more or less explicitly, as a dimension of wellbeing (Van Wingerden et al. 2017). In the first perspective, wellbeing is often connected and represented by the dimension of physical health (Fida et al., 2022; Van Dorseen et al., 2021) and EE is considered as a sort of vehicle to foster it. The second perspective is in line with the study proposed by Grant et al. (2007), in which wellbeing is composed by three dimensions, physical, psychological, and relational. Within this theoretical framework, EE is considered as a dimension of psychological wellbeing from eudaimonic viewpoint whereas job satisfaction from a hedonic perspective.

Starting from this consideration, our review highlights that no studies have investigated EE in relation with the two remaining dimensions of wellbeing (physical and relational) together. Additionally, our review also highlights the lack studies in which EE is analysed as a dimension of happiness at work (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018), a relative recent construct composed by three different dimensions: EE, job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment. These dimensions, if analysed together, may provide a general overview regarding mainly the psychological wellbeing of employees.

Summarizing, with this literature review, we have shown that engagement has a twofold impact on individuals and organizations. This aspect highlights how EE plays a key role in improving the general wellbeing of employees in an organization, and their performance, two dimensions that are often involved in a trade-off (Salas-Vallina et al., 2021). In line with other studies (Guest, 2017; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019), our review reinforces the need for companies to shift towards a human-centred approach rather than performance-centred approach. Whether one considers EE as antecedent wellbeing or as a dimension of it, it is the key ingredient in which investing energies and resources in order to influence and foster positively wellbeing jointly to performance. In fact, recent studies (e.g., Guest, 2017; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019) demonstrated that, when companies decide to orient their practices exclusively on performances, they negatively affect the wellbeing of their employees, and in turn, this produces a worsening of organizational outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study provides a historical evolution of EE and highlights three main findings. The first concerns the relevance and positive impact of exogenous variables on EE, in particular those related to social relations. The second finding regards the shift from a static to a more dynamic approach to EE. The third concerns the potential twofold impact of EE on performance and (psychological) wellbeing. In the upcoming paragraphs we point out the limitations that might affect our results and further research that, leveraging on them, it would be interesting to accomplish.

Limitations

There are several potentially limiting factors that should be considered in interpreting our findings. First, we restricted our research to only documents written in English. Second, given the remarkable volume of documents found initially, we selected only papers published in top journals (ranked as 4 and 4* in the ABS Academic Journal Guide), probably excluding other potentially interesting studies. Third, we decided to use Scopus and Web of Science, without consulting other sources. Fourth, although we have tried to show the relevant conceptual and theoretical evolution, we may have overlooked other conceptualisations or important theoretical frameworks. Fifth, by investigating only academic material, we have excluded management documents, thus potentially losing useful information. Sixth, as we used a wide spectrum of criteria for selecting papers, it was impossible to include all the antecedents and outcomes that have been analysed in relation to engagement over the years. Seventh, we have considered only the positive aspects of engagement, without investigating potential negative tendencies or relations with negative aspects. Eighth and last, the categories identified for gathering antecedents and outcome are subject to our own interpretation, and thus could be questionable.

Further research

Despite all the aforementioned limitations, we do believe that our findings pave the way for a renewed research agenda related to EE, even considering the current situation ensuing from Covid-19, which has dramatically changed the way in which we interact at work. We will examine these aspects further in the next sections.

Employee engagement as a social and contextual construct

First, our proposal is to rethink the concept of EE as a social and relational phenomenon rather than a pure psychological one. In accordance with the concept developed by Kahn, who defined it as the investment of physical, emotional and cognitive energies in a work role, EE could be considered as the multidimensional attachment of an actor towards his or her work role. Thus, we suggest a more social conceptualization of the construct, based on social interaction, exchange and recognition and focusing on the relationship between the self and an actor's work role. Within this framework, future studies could investigate the role played by endogenous and exogenous variables in predicting EE, seeking to detect the weight of each variable in determining it, establishing if one variable category plays a more critical role than the other.

Second, nowadays the way we work has changed because of Covid-19 and the workspace is increasingly shifting to a digital space. Organizations have had to adapt to this change and redesign their organizational models to encompass hybrid working. We believe that it is fundamental to carry out research through which investigating how hybrid working change the way people are engaged, for instance, by examining how digital technologies influence the relationships people have with their colleagues and supervisor, and how these technologies can impact on EE. Within this framework, we suggest that companies should invest energies and resources in order to create new forms of social interactions, social exchanges and social recognitions, adopting suitable digital solutions that permit communication and collaboration as well as to plan new moments and spaces through which individuals may experience these social dimensions.

Third, regarding organizational variables, it may be interesting to study how organizational policies could have a positive influence on EE, examining, for instance, how flexible work practices within a hybrid work setup can influence the degree of engagement. At the same time, it could be interesting to analyse how organizations can encourage EE, seeking an answer to problems that may occur when working in remote, such as hyper-connection, isolation and procrastination. Whether companies will be able to manage all these new kinds of issues and take care about their employees with suitable policies and actions they probably will answer with high levels of EE (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960). Employees are more engaged and effective when they perceive that their organizations and managers take care about their feeling and their needs (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Fourth, in order to better understand which implications and factors of the new ways of working may influence EE, we suggest that further research may adopt a more qualitative and interpretive approach to better investigate this phenomenon within hybrid working context (or decide to integrate it with a more quantitative/positivist approach). This phenomenological approach may help researcher to better identify possible factors able to impact EE and how engagement change in relation to hybrid working context.

Towards a dynamic conceptualization of employee engagement

In relation to the dynamic conceptualisation of EE, as a first point, it could be interesting to address future research towards developing the conceptualization of momentary work engagement, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the kinds of factors that can predict EE in a short period of time.

Second, it could be interesting to see if future studies will investigate and identify the kinds of antecedent that can impact on EE, in a short versus long period of time. The factors that produce EE in a short timeframe could have a negative impact in a longer timeframe for the same variable. It is necessary to disentangle the various effects and understand how to press the correct lever in a dynamic setting.

Third, the current situation caused by Covid-19 and the transition of work and social relations to virtual spaces and collaborative, advanced platforms could open the way to new ways of measuring and analysing EE, using approaches used in other fields, like machine learning. These new methods could offer opportunities to design algorithms able to measure and predict engagement in real time, bypassing the use of traditional surveys and providing an instrument useful for all organizations that intend to monitor and promote EE through an analytic approach. We believe that EE could be detected through innovative and dynamic approaches, measuring the physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions identified by Kahn, and potentially introducing wearable devices that can infer data on these aspects.

Employee engagement as an indicator of performance and wellbeing

We are now asking whether it still makes sense nowadays to focus so much attention on the concept of engagement per se, instead of shifting towards the interplay between EE and wellbeing, at both individual and organizational level. We suggest that future studies could/should inves-

tigate this relationship, delving deeper into the positive and negative effects associated with engaged employees, over short and long timeframes. We suggest that it could be interesting to investigate EE, which represents a facet of the psychological dimension of wellbeing together with the physical and relational dimensions, especially after pandemic, which has proved our health and wellbeing from different viewpoints. At the same time, it could be interesting also to deepen the topic of EE within the construct of happiness at work, reinforcing a shift towards a human-centred approach in handling people.

Second, we speculate that it could be interesting to understand and investigate through the medium of engagement which exogenous and endogenous variables influence wellbeing, performance or both, whether positively or negatively, in the short and long term.

Third, given the current situation linked to Covid-19 and many people now working in a hybrid space, it could be useful to analyse which and how the different forms of working have an influence on wellbeing and performance, examining them through the medium of EE. This aspect could be extremely relevant also for managers and companies that have to redesign their organizations in order to find the best fit of hybrid work able to stimulate and guarantee the general wellbeing of employees.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Open Access Funding provided by Politecnico di Milano within the CRUI-CARE Agreement.

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How to cite this article: Boccoli G., Gastaldi L. & Corso M. (2023) The Evolution of Employee Engagement: Towards a Social and Contextual Construct for Balancing Individual Performance and Wellbeing Dynamically. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 25, 75–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12304>

APPENDIX A

Differences among employee engagement and other constructs

It is not always easy to understand the concept of EE. On the one hand, it is often confused with other similar constructs – such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement and flow – while, on the other hand, there is no common, shared conceptualization (Bakker, 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). This confusion grew further during the operationalization of the construct (Byrne et al., 2016; Shuck et al., 2017). It is thus necessary to distinguish EE from other similar constructs.

Job Satisfaction (JS) is an attitude often defined as a ‘positive (or negative) evaluative judgment one makes about one’s job or job situation’ (Weiss, 2002, p. 175). JS and EE differ because the latter refers to a state of activation, whereas JS leads to a sensation similar to satiation (Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). In addition, JS is an evaluative description of a job characteristic, whereas EE concerns more the individual’s experiences during their worktime (Christian et al., 2011).

Organizational Commitment (OC) is characterised by an emotional attachment to one’s organization with which employees share values and interests (Christian et al., 2011). While OC refers to an affective attachment towards principles and values shared with an organization, EE is the result of perceptions that are based on the work itself (Christian et al., 2011; Maslach et al., 2001). Further, EE concerns the cognitive, emotional, physical, and psycho-

logical dimension related to work, whereas OC represents just the emotional state of attachment towards an organization (Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008). In other words OC refers exclusively on how individuals perceive to share the same values and principles of their organization, and how they are emotional attached to them.

Kanungo (1982) defined Job Involvement (JI) as a ‘cognitive or belief state of psychological identification’ (p. 342). JI concerns the cognitive belief that a job satisfies one’s personal needs, and it shows the degree to which individuals identify themselves with a job role, not only when at work but also in other settings (Christian et al., 2011). JI differs from EE because it is just a cognitive construct, while EE includes more dimensions (emotional and physical); in addition, JI is not limited to work tasks, but it refers to how a job is central to an individual’s identity and satisfies that person’s own needs (Christian et al., 2011). Kühnel et al. (2009) have shown that JI has a double-edged sword effect on EE; on the one hand, they proved that JI can exert a positive impact on EE through psychological detachment; on the other, if employees are always immersed in work without ever detaching themselves, JI could impact negatively on EE. In other words JI refers only to the cognitive dimension of a job role and it may produce even negative effects on individuals when employees do not detach themselves from their jobs.

Passion at work refers to a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they value significant, and in which they invest energies and time. It is possible to distinguish two types of passion, obsessive and harmonious (Vallerand et al., 2003). Obsessive passion is the result of an autonomous internalization of the activity into the person’s identity that generate a motivational force to engage in the activity willingly. Employees are not forced to do the activity, but they freely choose to do it (Vallerand et al., 2003). Obsessive passion, contrarily, is the result of a controlled internalization of the activity into one’s identity caused by intrapersonal and/or interpersonal pressure. Hence, although employees like the activity, they feel forced to carry on it due to these internal contingencies that control them (Vallerand et al., 2003). EE may share with this concept the dimension of dedication, which involve only the emotional dimension of engagement.

Another similar construct is represented by the conceptualisation of flow (Bakker et al., 2010). Flow is a positive state of mind, and we can experience it in our work and also more generally in different occasions during the day. Despite it sharing the dimension of absorption with EE, it is a momentary and volatile state. Table 5 shows all the items used for each of the main measure scales adopted by researchers to measure EE (see section Measurement scales)."

APPENDIX B

The most-widely used measurement scales for assessing employee engagement empirically

TABLE 5 The measurement scales mostly used to detect employee engagement

Scale	Reference	Dimension	Item
Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)	Schaufeli et al. (2002)	Vigour	1. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work*
			2. At work, I am bursting with energy*
			3. At work I always persevere, even when things are not going well
		Dedication	4. I can continue working for very long periods at a time
			5. In my job, I am very resilient, mentally
			6. In my job, I feel strong and vigorous*
			7. To me, my job is challenging
			8. My job inspires me*
			9. I am enthusiastic about my job*
		Absorption	10. I am proud of the work I do*
			11. I find the work I do full of meaning and purpose
			12. When I am working, I forget about everything else around me
			13. Time flies when I am working
			14. I get carried away when I am working*
			15. It is difficult to detach myself from my job
			16. I am immersed in my work*
			17. I feel happy when I am working hard*
Job Engagement Scale (JES)	Rich et al. (2010)	Physical Engagement	1. I work hard at my job
			2. I commit myself fully to my job
			3. I put a lot of energy into my job
			4. I try my hardest to do my job well
			5. I strive as hard as I can to complete my job
			6. I put a lot of energy into my job
		Emotional engagement	7. I am enthusiastic about my job
			8. I feel energetic in my job
			9. I am interested in my job
			10. I am proud of my job
			11. I feel positive about my job
			12. I am excited about my job
		Cognitive Engagement	13. At work, my mind is focused on my job
			14. At work, I pay a lot of attention to my job
			15. At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job
			16. At work, I am absorbed by my job
			17. At work, I concentrate on my job
			18. At work, I put a lot of attention into my job

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Scale	Reference	Dimension	Item
Job and Organization Engagement (JOES)	Saks, 2006	Job Engagement	1. I really 'throw' myself into my job
			2. Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time
			3. This job is all consuming; I am totally into it
			4. My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job**
			5. I am highly engaged in this job
		Organization Engagement	6. Being a member of this organization is very appealing
			7. One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things in this organization
			8. I am really not into the 'goings-on' in this organization**
			9. Being a member of this organization make me come 'alive'
			10. Being a member of this organization excites me
			11. I am highly engaged in this organization
The Gallup Workplace Audit (Q12)	Gallup, 1997	—	1. Do you know what is expected of you at work?
			2. Do you have the material and equipment to do your work properly?
			3. At work, can you do what you do best every day?
			4. In the last seven days, have you been recognised or praised for doing a good job?
			5. Does your line manager, or someone else at work, seem to care about you as a person?
			6. Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
			7. At work, do your opinions seem to count?
			8. Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel that your job is important?
			9. Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing work of a high standard?
			10. Do you have a best friend at work?
			11. In the past six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
			12. In the past year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?

*Item for the UWES short version.

**Reverse item.