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Article

The State Of Employee Engagement Research: Current Trends And Future Directions From The Bibliometric Lens

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement has emerged as a prominent focus in organisational research due to its substantial influence on productivity and organisational effectiveness. Despite the breadth of existing literature, notable gaps remain in understanding the multidimensional nature of engagement across diverse organisational contexts. This study aims to (1) analyse publication trends and the temporal evolution of employee engagement research, (2) identify influential authors, institutions, and countries, (3) map dominant research themes and intellectual structures, and (4) highlight emerging issues and future research directions. Using a bibliometric approach, this study systematically examines employee engagement scholarship published between 2014 and 2024. Guided by the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, the findings underscore the central role of leadership, organisational culture, and sustainable practices in shaping engagement outcomes. Emerging themes—including digital transformation, gig-economy dynamics, and cross-cultural variations—reflect the evolving complexity of engagement in modern workplaces. A key limitation of this study is its reliance on a single database (Lens.org), which may restrict the breadth of retrieved publications. Future research should incorporate multiple databases, employ mixed-methods reviews, and conduct longitudinal or cross-cultural empirical studies to deepen insights into engagement's antecedents and consequences. This study provides a robust platform for advancing theory and practice in employee engagement.

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Introduction

Over the decades, employee engagement has been deftly documented as a pivotal concern for organisations (Jiang and Shen, 2023; Tucker, 2020) and has gained popularity in several scholarly investigations (Tucker, 2020; Chandni and Rahman, 2020; Boccoli et al., 2023; Clack, 2021) as enterprises navigate the aftermath of the global economic downturn (Saks, 2006; Bailey et al., 2017; Andrew and Sofian, 2012; Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Saks, 2022). As firms rapidly recognise the impact of an engaged workforce, research on employee engagement has proliferated, yielding diverse findings across several disciplines, including organisational behaviour (Nienaber and Martins, 2020), psychology (Vakira et al., 2023; Bakker, 2022), management (Alolayyan and Alyahya, 2023), and human resources (Lee et al., 2020; Quek et al., 2021).

Past findings report that employee engagement is positively associated with increased employee retention (Saks et al., 2022), individual morale (Bailey et al., 2017; Saks, 2022; Boccoli et al., 2023), task performance (Mathushan and Shantha, 2024; Bailey et al., 2017; Saks et al., 2022), extra-role performance (Bailey et al., 2017; Clack, 2021), organisational productivity (Demerouti and Cropanzano, 2010) and organisational performance (Rich et al., 2010; Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Boccoli et al., 2023).

Moreover, the literature claims that the pressing need for work-life balance, the evolving dynamics between employers and employees, and the transient nature of technological superiority are significant factors pushing the demand for enhanced employee engagement (Lee et al., 2020). Engaged employees devote their attention to their jobs and demonstrate high energy and passion in executing activities at a superior level (Karatepe and Demir, 2014; Paek et al., 2015; Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Clack, 2021). As recognition grows that the most valuable resource within any organisation is its workforce, firms increasingly rely on Human Resources (henceforth HR) to develop a strategic framework to foster employee engagement (Mathushan and Kengatharan, 2022; Chandni and Rahman, 2020; Albrecht et al., 2021; Barreiro and Treglown, 2020; Saks, 2022).

Notwithstanding that employee engagement has taken the forefront (Saks et al., 2022; Clack, 2021; Sahni, 2021), there remains a dearth of scholarly work on the topic, and little is understood about how management can affect employee engagement (Kişi, 2023). Arguably, Crawford et al. (2014) stated that engagement has become one of the most significant concepts in the management field in recent years; yet, to date, no systematic review has brought together and synthesised the evidence base on engagement. This is concerning because, within the practitioner community, engagement has caught the attention of policymakers and employers keen to find new ways to leverage high levels of performance (Saks, 2022; Boccoli et al., 2023; Clack, 2021).

Despite the increasing prominence of employee engagement in organisational research and practice, the field remains theoretically fragmented and empirically inconsistent. Although engagement has been widely examined across disciplines such as organisational behaviour, psychology, HRM, and management, existing research lacks an integrated and up-to-date synthesis that captures how the concept has evolved in response to new organisational realities—including post-pandemic work arrangements, digital transformation, and changing psychological contracts.

Several scholars have highlighted that, despite its significance, engagement research continues to suffer from conceptual ambiguity, diverse measurement approaches, and heterogeneous theoretical foundations (Crawford et al., 2014; Kişi, 2023). Moreover, the rapid expansion of publications over the past decade has resulted in a dispersed knowledge base, making it increasingly challenging to identify dominant intellectual streams, methodological patterns, influential contributors, and critical gaps. Notably, although engagement has become a strategic priority for organisations, no comprehensive bibliometric mapping has systematically synthesised the trajectory, structure, and intellectual evolution of employee engagement research. The field lacks a consolidated, evidence-driven overview that integrates the most influential works, emerging themes, and structural relationships shaping

contemporary engagement scholarship. Without such a synthesis, researchers and practitioners face challenges in understanding where consensus exists, where debates persist, and where future inquiry is most needed.

This study delves into the state of employee engagement research to identify gaps in the literature and provide future research directions to improve our understanding of employee engagement and its organisational consequences (Sahni, 2021; Han et al., 2023; Baruah et al., 2023).

This research seeks to further the discourse on employee engagement and its essential role in building resilient, high-performing organisations. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its first holistic bibliometric analysis of the employee engagement literature, covering productivity, organisational behaviour, psychological perspectives, and HRM applications. Map the intellectual evolution of engagement research and uncover latent thematic structures that have not yet been systematically analysed. Identify emerging trends, underexplored areas, and conceptual blind spots, thereby offering a forward-looking research agenda aligned with contemporary organisational challenges. Integrate evidence across countries, authors, institutions, and methodologies, revealing the global scientific landscape of engagement research in ways traditional literature reviews cannot. By filling this methodological and conceptual gap, the study offers a robust and novel contribution: a consolidated evidence base that strengthens theoretical clarity, guides future investigations, and supports practitioners seeking research-grounded strategies to enhance engagement in increasingly dynamic workplaces. By filling this methodological and conceptual gap, the study offers a robust and novel contribution: a consolidated evidence base that strengthens theoretical clarity, guides future investigations, and supports practitioners seeking research-grounded strategies to enhance engagement in increasingly dynamic workplaces.

The research objectives of this study are threefold: (1) *to analyse the temporal distribution of publications;* (2)

to elucidate the contributions of the most prolific countries/territories, authors, and the most cited publications; (3) *to highlight prevalent keywords and research themes;* and (4) *to offer insights into future directions.* To achieve the research aim, this study uses a bibliometric approach to explore recent advancements, trends, and future directions in employee engagement research, offering a comprehensive assessment of the available literature (Kişi, 2023; Han et al., 2023). Utilising bibliometric methods enables a critical evaluation of progress in employee engagement research, identifying pivotal issues and recognising the most impactful papers and authors within the discipline (Baruah et al., 2023). This method facilitates a thorough comprehension of the evolution of engagement ideas, uncovering patterns that might inspire scholarly research and practical application.

The subsequent sections of the paper are organised as follows: Section 2 delineates the study's design, data sources, search technique, and the methodologies and tools used in the bibliometric analysis. Section 3 elucidates the outcomes of bibliometric indicators. Section 4 delineates and synthesises the results, research implications, limits, and avenues for further study.

Materials and methods

To thoroughly elucidate the developmental patterns in disciplinary knowledge and primary research themes, bibliometrics and a systematic literature review were integrated. Bibliometric analysis, a principal research approach in scientometrics, uses the knowledge domain as its subject to visualise and statistically assess the development process and structure of scientific knowledge, as well as to extract patterns in knowledge evolution and identify research hotspots (Donthu, Kumar, & Pattnaik, 2020). This study employs bibliometric analysis to systematically investigate and map the research landscape of employee engagement, focusing on its evolution, key contributors, and emerging themes over the past decade. The primary objective is to identify significant topics, prominent authors, and leading institutions, and to develop trends that intersect with employee engagement.

Data for this study were sourced from Lens.org, a comprehensive bibliographic database that provides extensive access to scholarly publications across diverse disciplines. The search criteria included keywords such

as "employee engagement" and related terms, along with subject areas such as "business, management, and accounting", "economics and finance", and "social sciences".

Publications were included in the final dataset if they met all of the following criteria: (1) *The article explicitly examined employee engagement, work engagement, or closely related constructs as a central theme*, (2) *were Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, or scholarly reviews*, (3) *were published between 2014 and 2024*, (4) *Written in English to ensure consistency in interpretation and analysis*.

The following categories of publications were excluded: (1) *Editorials, commentaries, theses, dissertations, professional magazines, blogs, organisational reports, and unpublished manuscripts*; (2) *Publications in which employee engagement was mentioned only tangentially or appeared without substantive conceptual, empirical, or theoretical discussion*, (3) *Repeated entries resulting from database indexing overlaps were removed during data cleaning*.

Advanced bibliometric tools, such as VOSviewer and R Bibliometrix, were employed to analyse and visualise complex bibliometric networks. These tools facilitated the exploration of co-authorship patterns, co-citation relationships, and keyword co-occurrence, providing insights into collaboration dynamics, influential research, and dominant themes within the field of employee engagement. This analytical framework provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of the current state and future directions of employee engagement research.

The analysis spans 10 years, from 2014 to 2024, and includes a comprehensive review of 1,000 documents sourced from 262 journals, books, and other sources. The annual growth rate of publications is 6.5%, indicating consistent scholarly interest and development in the field. The documents have an average age of 4.14 years, suggesting a focus on relatively recent studies. However, the average number of citations per document remains at zero, possibly due to limited indexing or a narrow field of influence. With 31,476 references cited across these

works, the dataset reflects substantial reliance on prior literature. Keywords Plus (ID) and Authors' Keywords (DE) total 306, indicating diverse thematic coverage.

Authorship statistics reveal 2,383 authors, of whom 184 are single-authors. Of the total 1,000 documents, 192 are single-authored, underscoring the prominence of collaboration. The co-authorship rate averages 2.71 authors per document, highlighting a solid trend toward collaborative research. This collective effort demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature and teamwork essential for addressing complex research questions within the field.

Results

Figure 2 depicts the trend in the publication count of journal articles on employee engagement research from 2014 to 2024. The trend began with around 60 articles in 2014 and remained relatively stable until 2017, characterised by slight fluctuations. Since 2018, there has been a steady increase in the number of journal articles published. This trend continues through 2020, indicating growing interest in the subject matter addressed by these publications. Between 2020 and 2021, there was a slight decline; nevertheless, growth returned markedly in 2022. In 2023, the number of publications reached roughly 200, representing the zenith of the era. In 2024, the trend reverses, with a significant decrease in published articles, falling to about 150.

Figure 2 presents the top authors by the number of documents (publications) they have contributed. This horizontal bar chart compares the publication output of individual authors. The variation in bar colours, from darker to lighter, indicates relative contribution levels, helping to highlight the top contributors visually. At the top of the chart, Arnold B Bakker is the most prolific author, with 12 publications. Following closely are Danish Ahmed Siddiqui, with around 10 publications, and Brad Shuck, with slightly fewer than 11. These three authors are represented by the darkest-coloured bars, indicating higher document counts than the others. The chart displays a gradual decline in the document count as we move down the list of authors. A mid-range cluster includes authors such as Alan Grottoom, Caroline Flammer, and Catherine Bailey, with publication counts ranging between 5 and 7 documents.

Towards the bottom, authors like Ali Raza, Armanda Dirin, and Catherine Pembrook have lower publication

counts, with around 3 to 4 documents each. These authors are represented with the lightest-colored bars.

The word cloud visualisation shows the most influential countries contributing to employee engagement research, likely based on their publication impact or research activity. Moreover, the size of each country's name reflects the volume of contributions,

with larger text sizes indicating higher research

Table 1: Main information about the data

Description	Results
Timespan	2014:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	262
Documents	964
Annual Growth Rate %	6.5
Document Average Age	4.14
Average citations per doc	0
References	31476
<i>Document contents</i>	
Keywords Plus (ID)	306
Author's Keywords (DE)	306
AUTHORS	
Authors	2383
Authors of single-authored docs	184
<i>Author collaboration</i>	
Single-authored docs	192
Co-Authors per Doc	2.71

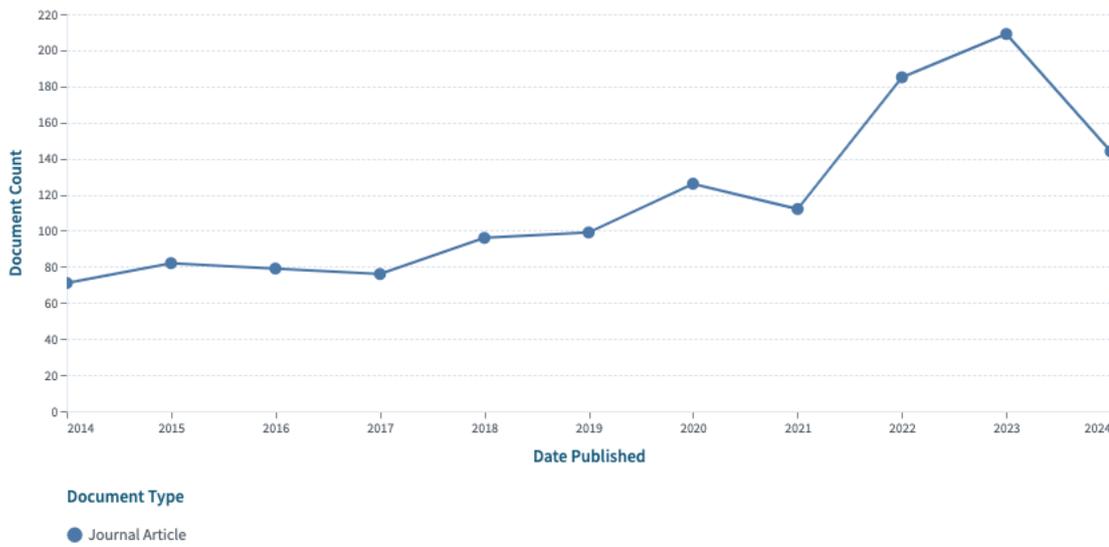


Figure 1 Year-wise publication of bibliometric papers

Note(s): This figure represents the publication trend of bibliometric papers between 2014 and 2024. The data was retrieved from the Lens.org database in the subject areas of “business, management, and accounting,” “economics, and finance,” and “social sciences” using the keyword “Employee Engagement *”.

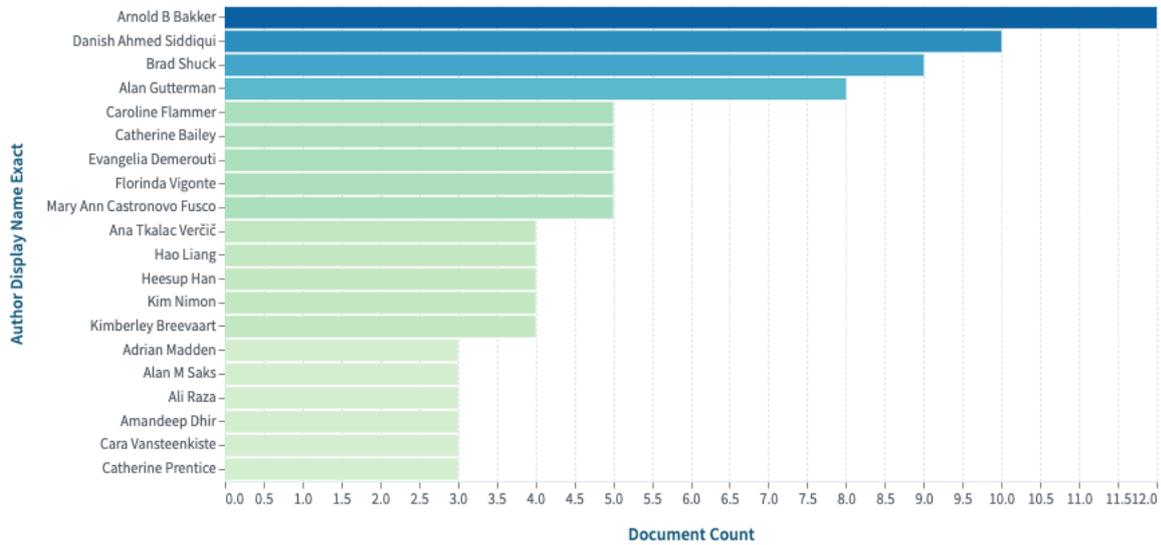


Figure 2 Most Active Authors in the employee engagement field

addressing engagement in emerging work environments like the gig economy, understanding cultural variations in engagement across global contexts, and exploring the impact of digital transformation on employee experiences (Shulga et al., 2023; Karatepe et al., 2019). Rupp (2011) is known for contributions to organisational justice and psychological safety. Rupp's work connects employee engagement with fairness and well-being. Bailey (2022) focused on meaningful work, employee value alignment, and engagement in different organisational contexts.

Research in healthcare shows that engaged employees provide better patient care and exhibit lower turnover (Shulga et al., 2023). Engaged employees thrive in organisations that emphasise inclusivity, fairness, and meaningful work. Post-pandemic studies highlight challenges and opportunities for engagement in remote and hybrid work environments, emphasising flexibility and technological adaptability. Karatepe et al. (2019) post that research consistently shows that engaged employees exhibit higher productivity, reduced

Citation analysis

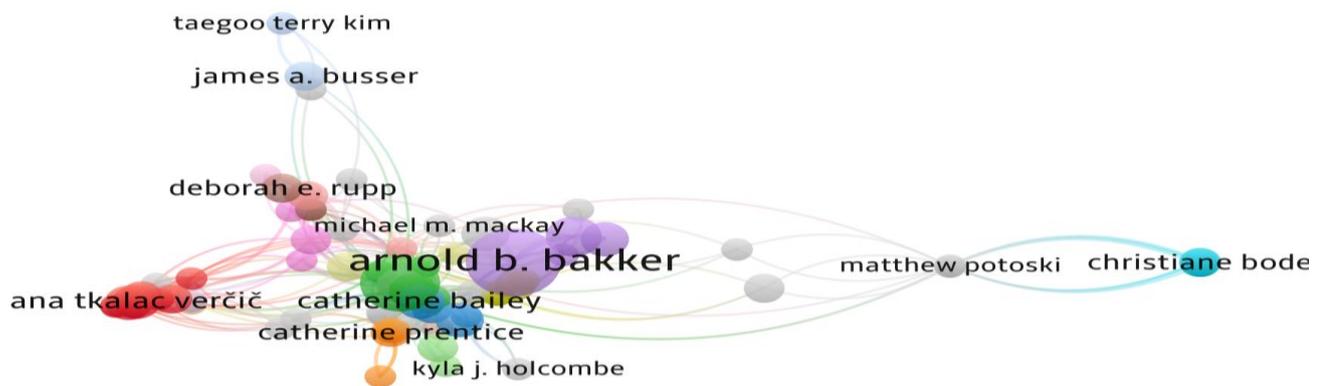


Figure 4 Citation analysis

Note: Items: 80, Links: 390, Total link strength: 574, Clusters: 17

Co-word analysis

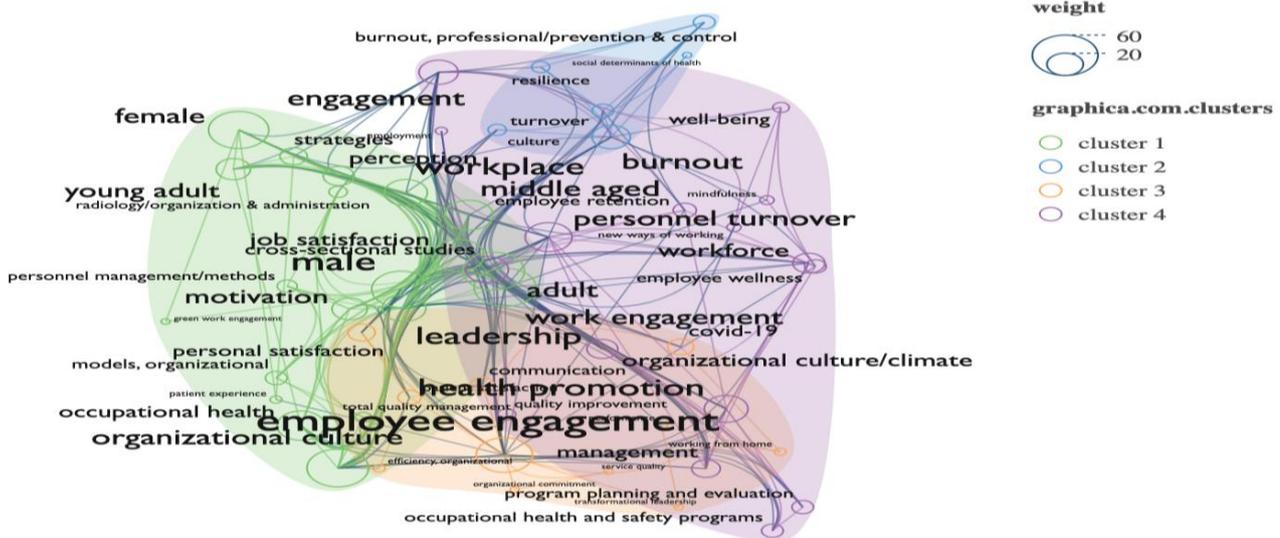


Figure 5 Co-word analysis of employee engagement research domain

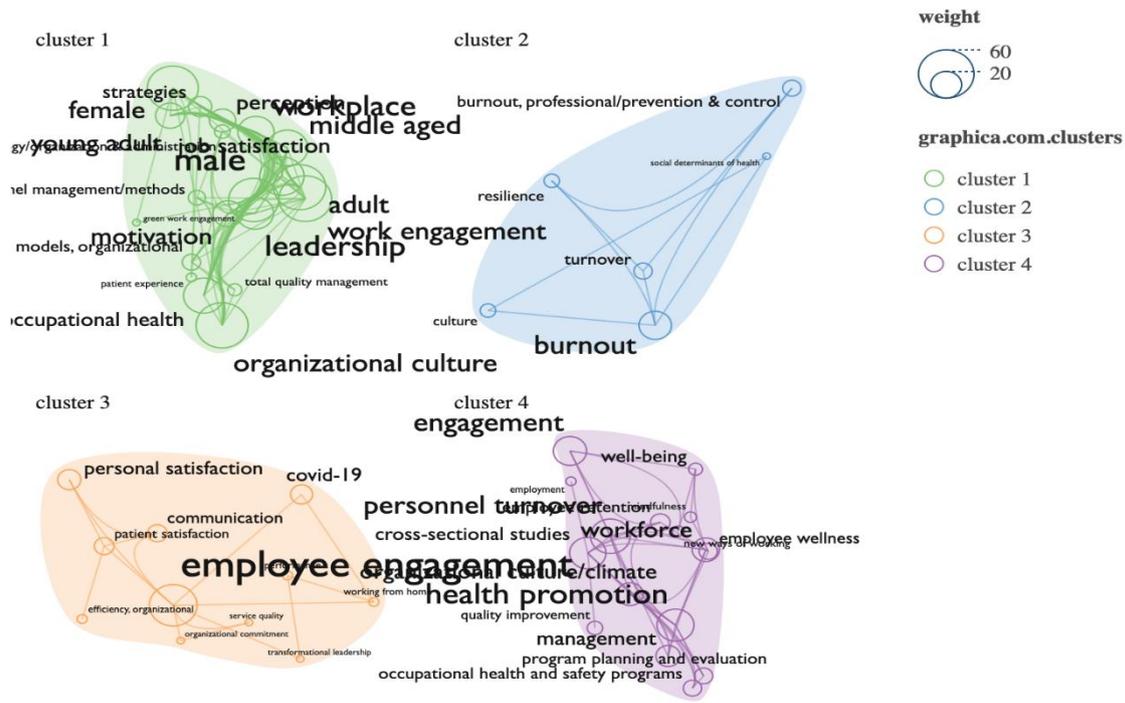


Figure 6 Cluster map analysis

turnover, and improved workplace morale. Further, leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, strongly impact employee engagement levels. Studies highlight that cultural and organisational contexts significantly shape how engagement is perceived and cultivated. Recent research explores how remote working and digital tools influence employee engagement, particularly post-pandemic.

Employee engagement has become a cornerstone of organisational success, deeply intertwined with workplace productivity, employee retention, and overall job satisfaction. This review integrates insights from multiple clusters to provide a holistic perspective.

Cluster 1 (Green): keywords such as leadership, organisational culture, motivation, job satisfaction, personal satisfaction, strategies, male, female, young adult, and middle-aged emphasise the foundational role of leadership, organisational culture, and motivation in fostering engagement. Research indicates that transformational leadership, characterised by vision-sharing and employee empowerment, significantly enhances engagement.

Furthermore, an organisational culture that aligns with employee values and fosters inclusivity creates a fertile ground for sustained engagement. Personal satisfaction, highlighted in this cluster, is strongly tied to motivational strategies that recognise individual contributions and align tasks with personal aspirations.

Cluster 2 (Blue): delves into engagement challenges, focusing on workplace burnout, resilience, turnover, professional prevention & control, social determinants of health, and culture. Studies show that high levels of burnout, driven by excessive workload and a lack of support, are inversely correlated with employee engagement. Resilience, however, acts as a mitigating factor, enabling employees to navigate workplace stressors effectively. Interventions such as mindfulness training and resilience-building workshops are increasingly being explored as ways to bolster engagement and reduce turnover.

Cluster 3 (Orange): shifts the lens toward health promotion and its relationship with engagement. The keywords include Employee engagement, personal satisfaction, communication, patient satisfaction, COVID-19, service quality, organisational commitment, and

transformational leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought health and wellness to the forefront of organisational priorities. When integrated into organisational policies, programs aimed at physical and mental health promotion have been shown to enhance engagement by demonstrating care for employee well-being. Communication emerges as a vital thread in this cluster, underscoring the importance of transparent, empathetic dialogue to maintain employee trust and commitment.

Cluster 4 (Purple): addresses the interplay between health promotion, well-being, employee wellness, workforce, personnel turnover, organisational climate, program planning, occupational health and safety programs, and engagement. High turnover rates not only disrupt team dynamics but also erode engagement among remaining employees. Research suggests that creating a favorable organisational climate, characterised by fairness, recognition, and opportunities for growth, can counteract the adverse effects of turnover. Furthermore, cross-sectional studies within this cluster highlight the importance of tailored engagement strategies that consider diverse employee needs, including gender and generational differences. Despite these insights, several gaps remain. The impact of digital transformation on employee engagement, particularly in remote and hybrid work settings, requires further exploration. Additionally, the integration of sustainable practices into engagement frameworks, as suggested by the concept of green work engagement, requires further development. Finally, a more nuanced understanding of engagement across different industries and cultural contexts is essential to address the diverse challenges of the modern workforce. Future research can contribute to a more comprehensive and actionable understanding of employee engagement by addressing these gaps.

Bibliometric coupling analysis

Bibliometric coupling is a method used in literature-based research to ascertain the degree of relatedness between various authors or articles based on their shared references. When two writers reference several identical sources, they are considered "coupled," signifying their participation in analogous research dialogues or intellectual traditions.

The bibliometric coupling visualisation identifies

three key intellectual groupings throughout the literature. Each cluster signifies a cohesive research tradition linked by standard references, theoretical underpinnings, and methodological strategies.

The cluster patterns in the bibliometric coupling analysis further highlight the field's fragmentation into three dominant streams: meaningful work and identity; work engagement and well-being (centred on JD-R); and leadership and organisational performance. While each stream reflects conceptual depth, its coexistence with limited cross-integration suggests a siloed scholarly landscape. The modern workplace, however, is characterised by converging challenges—digitalisation, emotional labour, cultural diversity, and sustainability—that require integrative models capable of synthesising insights from multiple theoretical traditions.

Red cluster: high-performance HR practices, organisational trust and identity.

This cluster examines how firms cultivate trust and engage employees through meaningful employment. Researchers enhance comprehension of the emotional and psychological determinants influencing engagement and organisational identity. Employee engagement is fundamental in managing human capital (Bassi & McMurrer, 2007) and developing a high-performance workforce (Buchanan, 2004). Furthermore, employee engagement is a crucial safeguard against elevated turnover rates in challenging labour markets (Buchanan, 2004). Engaging workers has become a strategic need to cultivate a dedicated workforce, providing organisations a lasting competitive edge (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). Zhong et al. (2016) demonstrated that high-performance HR practices were directly associated with job engagement and indirectly linked to employees' perceived organisational support. Job engagement was positively correlated with in-role performance and negatively correlated with willingness to quit. Culture emerged as a significant contextual factor, as our findings indicated that the correlation between HR practices and felt organisational support was more pronounced in environments characterised by high collectivism and low power distance.

Blue cluster: workplace behaviour, job demands-resources model, and leadership

This cluster addresses employee well-being through frameworks like the job demands-resources (JD-R) model. Scholars explore how leadership behaviours,

workplace demands, and resources impact productivity, stress, and employee outcomes. The concept of employee engagement has increasingly been recognised as beneficial to organisations. Nonetheless, the significance of employee engagement in elucidating job performance behaviours relative to analogous notions still needs to be explored. Saks and Gruman (2014) present a theory of employee engagement that synthesises Kahn's (1990) engagement theory with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Saks and Gruman (2014) assert that a consensus on the definition of employee engagement remains elusive, as does the validity of the predominant measurement of employee engagement.

Moreover, drawing causal inferences about the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement is challenging due to numerous methodological limitations. Consequently, innumerable concerns

remain, and additional work is required to establish a science and philosophy of employee engagement. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) confirmed that employee engagement mediates the association between the perceived learning climate and extra-role behaviours. Furthermore, engagement offers a more comprehensive elucidation than job pleasure or job involvement in these relationships. Breevaart et al. (2014) demonstrated that daily self-management was positively correlated with the daily work environment's resourcefulness, greater skill diversity, and increased feedback and development opportunities, which enhanced workers' daily job engagement. Contrary to their predictions, the measurement model indicated that two of the five self-management methods (i.e., self-reward and self-punishment) clustered into a distinct component and exhibited no correlation with any work resources. The results enhance our comprehension of workers' capacity to manage their daily job engagement.

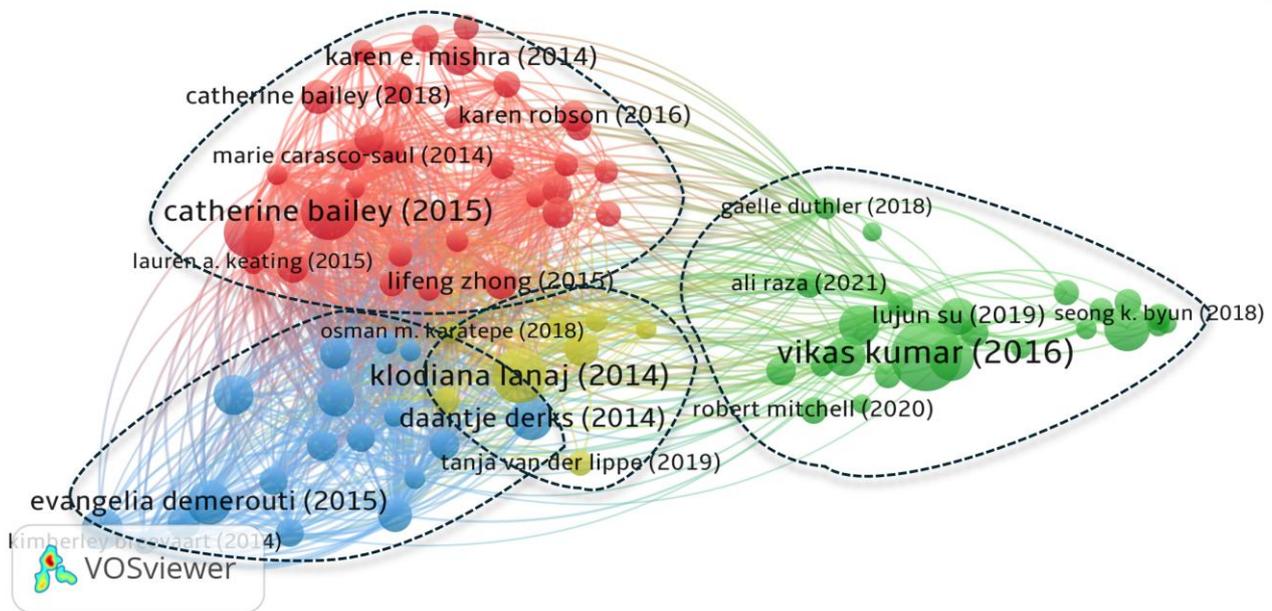


Figure 7 Bibliometric coupling analysis

Note: Items: 82, Links: 1933, Total link strength: 6689, Clusters: 4

Transformational leadership is associated with a range of positive outcomes. According to the substitutes for leadership theory, there may be situations in which it is difficult, if not impossible, for leaders to motivate and engage their workforce.

Breevaart et al. (2016) demonstrated that workers exhibited greater job engagement and received superior performance evaluations from their leaders when leaders used more transformational leadership behaviours and when individuals used more self-leadership techniques. Additionally, we demonstrated

that transformational leadership behaviours were more effective when individuals strongly demanded leadership, whereas the converse held for employee self-leadership. These results enhance our comprehension of workers' roles in the transformative leadership process.

Green cluster: sustainable business practices, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and innovation

This cluster focuses on sustainability, CSR, and ethical business strategies. Researchers such as Vikas Kumar examine how organisations integrate sustainable practices and corporate responsibility into their operations to promote long-term value. Flammer and Luo (2017) investigate whether corporations utilise corporate social responsibility (CSR) to enhance employee engagement and reduce negative workplace behaviours, such as shirking and absenteeism. They utilise seemingly exogenous variations in state unemployment insurance (UI) benefits from 1991 to 2013. Increased unemployment insurance benefits are associated with greater participation in employee-related corporate social responsibility initiatives. This research indicates that organisations utilise CSR as a strategic management instrument—specifically, an employee governance mechanism—to enhance employee engagement and mitigate the risk of detrimental behaviour.

Growing evidence indicates that employees' perceptions of their employer's corporate social responsibility (CSR) positively correlate with employee work engagement (Rupp et al., 2018). This connection is significant because job engagement influences employee well-being and organisational productivity, and CSR has societal relevance. This research contends that the relationship between CSR perceptions and work engagement cannot be regarded as universal, as individual and contextual factors impose significant boundary requirements on this effect. By synthesising motivation and cross-cultural theories, we argue that the correlation between employees' perceptions of CSR and their work engagement will be stronger among those who recognise greater CSR-specific relative autonomy (i.e., employees' contextualised motivation to comply with, advocate for, and engage in CSR activities). Furthermore, this enhancement effect will be more significant among employees exhibiting higher levels

of individualism (analysed at the individual level). The predictions were predominantly corroborated by a sample of 673 employed persons from five distinct regions (Canada, mainland China, France, Hong Kong, and Singapore) while accounting for first-party justice judgements, moral identity, employee demographics, and employer/national factors. Theoretical and practical implications are examined.

Demerouti et al. (2015) demonstrate that resource-seeking indirectly influences contextual performance via work engagement and creativity, and that both work engagement and thriving mediate this influence. Reducing demands negatively influenced contextual performance and creativity via work engagement.

Yellow cluster: leadership, communication, and digital work behaviour

This smaller cluster focuses on leadership behaviours and their impact on communication and employee behaviour in modern digital work environments. The studies address the challenges of remote work, technology use, and virtual collaboration.

Lanaj et al. (2014) asserted that smartphones have emerged as ubiquitous technology, providing employees with immediate access to work-related information and communication beyond the office environment. Notwithstanding these benefits, there may be drawbacks to nighttime smartphone use for work purposes. Utilising ego-depletion theory, Lanaj et al. (2014) investigated the impact of smartphone use on employees' regulatory depletion and its subsequent effect on their work engagement the following day. Two studies employing experience sampling techniques revealed that nighttime smartphone use for work heightened depletion the following morning due to its impact on sleep, morning fatigue, and therefore, reduced involvement in the day job. The indirect effects of smartphone usage on depletion and engagement the following day were supplementary to the impact of other electronic devices (e.g., computers, tablets, and television). Lanaj et al. (2014) found evidence suggesting that the adverse effects of morning depletion on daily work engagement may be mitigated by job control, indicating that depletion affects work engagement only among employees with poor job control.

Petrou et al. (2018) demonstrate that effective change

communication correlates with heightened work-crafting behaviours among promotion-focused employees. In contrast, insufficient change communication is associated with elevated job crafting among prevention-focused employees. Moreover, the pursuit of resources correlates favourably with employee work engagement, the quest for difficulties correlates positively with adaptability, and the reduction of demands correlates poorly with work engagement.

Mishra et al. (2014) found that internal communication is crucial for establishing a culture of transparency between management and employees and for engaging employees with the organisation's priorities. Executives utilise a range of communication methods, including face-to-face interactions, to connect with employees. The communication strategies these executives have selected are designed to cultivate trust and engagement among employees. Consequently, public relations executives assume a more prominent role in promoting employee engagement.

Gamification and engagement are prominent topics in business literature (Kim and Mauborgne, 2014; Robson et al., 2015). Gamification, defined as the application of game design concepts to modify behaviour in non-gaming environments, is a technology that, when designed and executed effectively, can enhance engagement. Robson et al. (2016) investigated gamification, the application of game-like elements in non-game contexts to engage customers and employees. The essay examines the strategic application of gamification in organisations to enhance motivation, improve user experience, and foster greater engagement. It highlights how gaming elements, such as prizes, points, leaderboards, and challenges, can turn mundane activities into more pleasurable and stimulating experiences.

Derks et al. (2015) propose that supervisors clarify their expectations concerning smartphone usage during personal time, emphasising that employees should not be expected to be perpetually accessible. Furthermore, we ascertain that engaged employees can mitigate the intrusion of work into their personal lives, even when utilising their smartphones during evening hours.

Roberts and David (2017) examined the effects of a prevalent supervisor behaviour: boss phubbing (phone snubbing). Boss phubbing (BPhubbing) is defined as the degree to which a supervisor utilises or is distracted by their mobile device in the presence of subordinates, and we investigate its effects on supervisory trust and the psychological prerequisites for employee engagement. Three experiments were conducted to evaluate the research hypotheses, using a continuous measure and a situational prime for BPhubbing. The findings indicate that BPhubbing exerts a detrimental indirect influence on employee engagement. BPhubbing diminishes employee engagement by eroding supervisory trust and reducing engagement through the psychological factors of meaningfulness and availability. This research presents theoretical and practical implications regarding the detrimental effects of smartphone use, namely BPhubbing, on job-related outcomes. The findings offer comprehensive theoretical insight into the psychological mechanisms underlying BPhubbing's effects on employee engagement. The results indicate that supervisory training and explicit business policy about smartphone usage are necessary.

A major conclusion that emerges from this investigation is the centrality—but also the constraint—of established theoretical models, most notably the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework and Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions of engagement. These models continue to anchor the majority of contemporary research and provide valuable explanatory power; however, their dominance risks overshadowing alternative perspectives and limiting theoretical innovation. The field's over-reliance on these established frameworks suggests the need to incorporate additional paradigms—such as affective events theory, institutional theory, or relational and identity-based perspectives—to enrich understanding of engagement in increasingly complex work environments.

Voids found in the employee engagement literature

The role of cultural diversity in shaping employee engagement within multi-national organisations still needs to be explored. Further, the nexus of remote work on personal engagement, specifically among younger employees, is not well-connected. There is limited research on the long-term psychological impacts of workforce turnover on remaining employees'

engagement. A deeper investigation into how resilience training programs directly influence employee engagement could bridge a gap. Few studies have examined the influence of digital leadership styles (e.g., remote teams) on employee engagement. The intersection of health promotion activities and organisational culture in driving employee engagement is relatively unexplored.

While mindfulness is highlighted, its integration into routine workplace practices for enhancing engagement must be explored. Research on personalised wellness programs and their impact on reducing personnel turnover and improving engagement is limited. There is insufficient focus on how technology adoption and automation influence employee engagement across different sectors. The connections between green work engagement (environmentally friendly practices) and long-term organisational commitment are weakly represented. There is a lack of research into the gendered dynamics of employee engagement, particularly in male-dominated industries. These gaps provide opportunities for future research to better understand the multifaceted aspects of employee engagement in contemporary workplaces.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal an increasingly complex and multidimensional landscape of employee engagement research, shaped by evolving organisational realities, diversifying methodological approaches, and shifting socio-economic contexts. Although the field has grown significantly over the last decade, bibliometric evidence indicates that current scholarship remains uneven, theoretically clustered, and geographically skewed—issues with important implications for both academic inquiry and practical application.

A primary observation is the dominance of established theoretical frameworks—particularly the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Kahn’s (1990) psychological conditions of engagement. While the strong presence of Bakker, Demerouti, Schaufeli, Bailey, and Saks validates the centrality of these frameworks, it also exposes a theoretical saturation that may inadvertently constrain innovation. Much of the existing research applies, extends, or replicates the

JD-R model, with relatively few studies offering alternative conceptualisations. This suggests a form of intellectual path dependency, in which scholars repeatedly reinforce existing assumptions rather than explore novel explanatory mechanisms such as affective events theory, social exchange perspectives, or institutional cultural frameworks. The heavy reliance on JD-R constructs may therefore risk oversimplifying engagement by reducing it to demand–resource imbalances rather than acknowledging broader socio-structural determinants.

The cluster analysis further reveals a disciplinary fragmentation that divides engagement scholarship into three dominant streams: (1) meaningful work, identity, and affective commitment; (2) workplace well-being, burnout, and JD-R; and (3) leadership, innovation, and organisational performance. While these clusters indicate conceptual maturity, they also highlight siloed knowledge production. For example, leadership-driven engagement studies largely ignore insights from the burnout or smartphone-detachment literature, despite clear conceptual interdependencies. Likewise, scholars focusing on meaningful work rarely engage with research on digital fatigue, technostress, or precariousness in the gig economy. This fragmentation limits cumulative theoretical development and prevents the emergence of holistic models capable of addressing complex, modern work contexts.

Another critical issue emerging from the bibliometric mapping is the geographical concentration of engagement research. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia remain dominant knowledge producers, while contributions from South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America remain marginal. This imbalance reflects a Western epistemological bias that problematizes the universalisation of findings. Engagement constructs developed in individualistic, low-power-distance societies may not translate directly into collectivist or resource-constrained environments. As the cultural boundary conditions of JD-R, CSR perceptions, and leadership styles demonstrate, engagement is contextually embedded; therefore, the lack of culturally diverse samples undermines global applicability. The scarcity of cross-cultural comparative research represents a significant gap that weakens the field’s theoretical robustness.

The emergence of digital and remote-work themes in recent years marks a significant shift but remains insufficiently theorised. Studies addressing smartphone intrusion, boss phubbing, virtual leadership, and digital communication appear as isolated pockets rather than a coherent research trajectory. Although digitalisation reshapes work boundaries, emotional labour, and attentional capacities, engagement research still lacks integrated models explaining engagement in hybrid or algorithmic work environments. The current literature also underexplores how digital platforms, surveillance technologies, gig-work platforms, and AI-mediated decision systems reshape psychological meaningfulness and resource allocations. This gap is particularly troubling as technological transformation accelerates faster than theoretical frameworks can accommodate.

CSR, sustainability, and green work engagement form another emerging cluster, but the relationship between sustainable organisational practices and engagement remains conceptually thin. Most CSR studies apply surface-level social-exchange logic, assuming that employees reciprocate perceived organisational benevolence with higher engagement. Yet, few studies interrogate whether CSR-driven engagement is contingent on employee values, organisational authenticity, or ethical leadership. The assumption that CSR uniformly enhances engagement may be overly simplistic, given evidence that performative or symbolic CSR can create cynicism and disengagement.

A further critical gap relates to methodological limitations. The bibliometric results indicate that most studies are cross-sectional, survey-based, and rely on self-reported data. These designs limit causal inference and overlook dynamic, temporal processes. Engagement is episodic and fluctuates daily, but longitudinal and diary-based inquiries remain sparse outside the Netherlands and Scandinavian regions. The field also lacks experimental and mixed-method studies that could uncover hidden mechanisms or challenge prevailing assumptions. The absence of multilevel models is equally problematic, as engagement arises not only from individual perceptions but also from team dynamics, organisational climate, and institutional structures.

Finally, the findings reveal notable silences in the literature. Despite the acknowledged importance of diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality, gendered, generational, and ethnic differences in engagement remain severely underexplored. Similarly, there is limited research on engagement in precarious labour markets, blue-collar industries, informal economies, and public-sector environments. The overwhelming focus on corporate and service-sector samples creates a narrow understanding of engagement that may not hold for workers in high-risk, low-autonomy, or marginalised sectors.

The bibliometric patterns highlight a field that is theoretically rich yet uneven, empirically active yet methodologically conservative, and globally expanding yet culturally narrow. While engagement research has matured, it still requires conceptual diversification, methodological innovation, and contextual sensitivity to remain relevant in an era of digital transformation, demographic change, and organisational volatility.

Implications for theory and practice

The present study provided several implications for theory and practice. Organisations can leverage insights from this study to implement strategies that enhance employee engagement, directly improving productivity and reducing turnover. Focusing on job resources such as leadership support, skill diversity, and performance feedback can motivate employees and sustain their engagement.

The analysis underscores the critical role of leadership in fostering employee engagement. Organisations should invest in leadership development programs that promote transformational leadership, which has been linked to higher engagement. Transformational leadership strongly influences engagement. Organisations can implement leadership development programs to equip managers with skills to inspire and foster engagement through better communication, motivation, and inclusivity.

The rise of digital technologies and remote work necessitates organisations to adapt their engagement strategies. Leveraging digital tools to facilitate collaboration, provide flexibility, and support work-life balance can help maintain and boost engagement in

virtual settings. Training programs to enhance digital competencies are also essential. The findings suggest that technology, such as AI and digital collaboration tools, can enhance or hinder engagement. Organisations should design technology integration strategies that support remote and hybrid work environments without compromising employee well-being.

A positive organisational culture emphasising open communication, trust, and inclusivity is vital for engagement. Implementing transparent communication channels and encouraging employee voice can lead to a more engaged workforce. Regular feedback mechanisms and recognition programs can further reinforce positive behaviours and commitment.

The JD-R model has been instrumental in understanding employee engagement. However, the evolving nature of work, including the gig economy and remote work trends, suggests a need to refine the model to account for new job demands and resources. Future research should explore how digitalisation and flexible work arrangements influence the balance between job demands and resources. This study reinforces the utility of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model in understanding employee engagement, emphasising its role in linking job demands, resources, and outcomes.

Contribution of the study

First, the study provides the most comprehensive bibliometric mapping of employee engagement research published between 2014 and 2024. By analysing 964 documents across 262 sources, the study consolidates a dispersed research landscape. It offers an evidence-based understanding of the field's intellectual structure, dominant theories, influential authors, and evolving thematic trends. This addresses a long-standing gap noted by prior scholars who argued that no systematic synthesis had adequately captured the evolution of engagement research over time.

Second, by integrating bibliometric analysis with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, the study contributes a theory-informed interpretation of engagement scholarship. It highlights how JD-R remains the dominant explanatory framework while revealing areas where the model has become

saturated and may require theoretical diversification. This insight advances scholarly discourse by identifying where theoretical expansion is most needed.

Third, the study adds value by uncovering new and emerging intellectual frontiers—including digital work behaviour, gig-economy engagement, sustainability and CSR-driven engagement, and cross-cultural engagement dynamics. By mapping these emerging clusters, the study provides a future-oriented research agenda that reflects contemporary organisational realities.

Fourth, the study highlights significant geographical and contextual imbalances in current research. With Western countries dominating scholarly output, this study emphasises the need for culturally sensitive, non-Western, and comparative research on engagement. This contribution is critical for enhancing the global relevance and applicability of engagement theory.

Fifth, the analysis identifies notable methodological limitations in existing scholarship, including the heavy reliance on cross-sectional designs and self-report data. By emphasising the need for longitudinal, experimental, diary-based, and multi-level research designs, the study offers concrete methodological pathways for strengthening future research rigour.

Eventually, the study adds practical value by synthesising evidence on the organisational drivers of engagement—leadership, organisational culture, digital readiness, and sustainability practices—and offering actionable guidance for practitioners seeking to build high-performing, resilient, and future-ready workforces.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the employee engagement research landscape from 2014 to 2024 using a bibliometric methodology. The analysis demonstrates that employee engagement remains a critical yet evolving construct, attracting substantial scholarly attention. While established frameworks such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Kahn's (1990) engagement theory dominate the field, their prevalence also highlights a lack of theoretical diversification. Engagement research is conceptually rich but remains fragmented across three main streams—meaningful work, well-being and burnout, and leadership and organisational performance—with limited integration between them.

The findings reveal significant geographical and

contextual imbalances: Western nations dominate research output, while studies from Asia, Africa, and Latin America remain underrepresented. This limits the global applicability of existing theories and underscores the need for culturally sensitive research. Although emerging areas such as digital work behaviour, remote leadership, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility are gaining attention, they are not yet theoretically cohesive or extensively examined.

Methodologically, engagement research continues to rely heavily on cross-sectional and self-report designs, restricting causal inference and the ability to capture the dynamic nature of engagement. Longitudinal, experimental, and multi-level approaches remain scarce, indicating a clear opportunity for methodological advancement.

Finally, the study concludes that the future development of employee engagement research depends on broadening theoretical perspectives, adopting more rigorous and diverse research methods, and expanding empirical work into non-Western and technologically transforming contexts. Addressing these gaps will enable a more holistic, future-ready understanding of how engagement evolves in modern, digital, and culturally diverse workplaces.

Limitations and future research directions

Like other studies, the present study has several limitations. This evaluation is thorough but not all-encompassing. The research utilises the lens.org database. We advocate using Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, and more databases for comprehensive and comparative analysis in future research. Gathering samples from several databases would greatly enhance the research. The keywords used should be enhanced to include more relevant terms when searching the database. The study's results benefit researchers investigating employee engagement in the research landscape and focal areas. Secondly, we confined our investigation to articles published in academic publications, excluding dissertations, book chapters, and books. Additional understanding may be attained by incorporating additional credible sources. Moreover, while we endeavoured to be dependable

and thorough, theoretical frameworks may guide the supplementary evaluation. Furthermore, even though we made an effort to be dependable and thorough, the additional review can be theory-driven.

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