

Beyond Western models: Rethinking employee engagement from non-Western empirical perspectives¹

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Abstract

Employee engagement is an essential driver of organizational success, yet most frameworks are Western-centric and overlooked non-Western perspectives. This review examines how culturally responsive antecedents influence engagement in non-Western contexts. We conducted a systematic literature review of major databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar to find out the relevant literature. The main focus was to analyze theoretical models, measurement tools, and sectoral and geographical applications with a greater emphasis on methodological and regional diversity. The results reveal that employee engagement is consistently linked to performance, retention, and well-being across various contexts. However, the drivers of engagement differ significantly, with autonomy and personal resources in Western contexts, while in non-Western contexts, collectivism, hierarchical structures, and relational trust resources are the key drivers of engagement, indicating that cultural factors play crucial role in shaping engagement strategies. The studies heavily relied on a scale developed in Western contexts, this raised concerns about cultural validity, highlighting the need for locally developed scales. This review paper specifically enhances cross-cultural organizational psychology by integrating universal engagement principles with specific factors driven by local cultures. It focuses mainly on the necessity of creating indigenous measurement tools and suitable human resource development strategies for various contexts, offering understandings of engagement that

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are both globally and locally significant, how the same strategy could be significant for local and global context? particularly in addressing the unique challenges faced by organizations in different cultural settings.

Keywords: Job Demands-Resource model, Social Exchange Theory, employee engagement

Introduction

According to Kahn (1990a) and Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), employee engagement refers to a widely recognized central construct in human resource development, which includes organizational psychology, employee retention, and employee well-being for enhancing employees' performance. Kahn (1992) asserts that employee engagement entails the effective utilization of employees' cognitive, emotional, and physical energies in their work roles rendering it a vital factor for organizational success. According to Harter *et al.* (2002), the robust association of employee engagement between work performance and various organizational outcomes, which includes customer loyalty, employee productivity and financial profits, and satisfaction, has been frequently demonstrated by extensive research for more than two decades. Employee attributes and work characteristics significantly predict employee engagement, which in turn influences individual employee, team, and organizational performance, as endorsed by empirical research regardless of the particular employee engagement model used (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Adisa *et al.*, 2021). There are a number of meta-analyses and review studies that have found an association between engagement and its positive relationship with behavioral, attitudinal, and performance-related outcomes (Demerouti *et al.*, 2010; Anand & Acharya, 2021). According to OECD (2021), there are various elements that affect employee engagement; the common elements include leadership quality and perceived management, possibilities for career development, and working environment. Hence, it is possible to view employee engagement as a performance indicator for people management in the organizations. Employee engagement is closely related to the psychological factors, such as satisfaction and contentment, that influence employee performance (Albrecht, 2012).

Western contexts have dominated much of the theoretical development and empirical evidence. Saks (2006) and Bakker and Demerouti (2008) asserted that studies in Europe and North America shaped prevailing models such as the Job Demands-Resource model and Social Exchange Theory, which continue to guide both managerial

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practice and academic inquiry. The reviews and meta-analyses further confirm this Western bias, frequently overlooking varied institutional and cultural contexts (Shuck *et al.*, 2017; Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). According to Tauetsile (2021) and Crafford (2021), employee engagement in a non-Western context presents unique economic, institutional, and cultural dynamics, which could influence how engagement is conceptualized, experienced, and measured. For instance, hierarchical organizational structures, collectivist orientations, and resource constraints in many Latin American, African, and Asian countries recommend that employee engagement can demonstrate differently than in Western organizational settings (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009; Karatepe, 2013). However, these regions' research remains underrepresented and fragmented in mainstream literature, and is often reliant on the Western and developed countries' scales without substantial validation of culture (Attridge, 2009). However, a few research have been carried out in this field in non-Western contexts by Niraula and Kharel (2023), Goyal *et al.* (2025), and Niraula *et al.* (2025).

Therefore, this study aims to consolidate the contemporary literature on employee engagement conducted in non-Western contexts, focusing on both convergence and divergence with Western understandings. Particularly, it aims, to identify the existing theoretical models and methodological approaches used in non-Western literature; to examine the cultural validity and relevance of engagement measures; reveal gaps that warrant future directions and investigation.

Review of literature

The Western researcher and thinker, Kahn (1990a), conceptualized employee engagement, which focused on harnessing employees' cognitive, emotional, and physical energies towards work. Subsequent research efforts aimed to operationalize the construct of 'employee engagement.' At the same time, researchers Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) introduced and operationalized employee engagement through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, which focused on vigor, dedication, and absorption. The Western researchers Bakker and Demerouti (2008) and Saks (2006) largely advanced the theories, such as Job Demands-Resource and Social Exchange Theory, that highlighted the interplay of organizational resources, employee perceptions, and outcomes of engagement. The meta-analyses and reviews from North America and Europe demonstrated a disproportionate focus of engagement studies. According to Horak *et al.* (2025), cultural norms, informal networks, and ethical contexts may determine different

engagement antecedents, which highlight the need for more nuanced understanding of how these factors vary across different cultural and institutional contexts. Scales conducted in Asia, Japan, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East validate employee engagement in non-Western contexts. The Indian study highlights the role of collectivist values and hierarchical structures in shaping engagement. According to Aggarwal *et al.* (2022), there is a positive effect of perceived procedural justice, perceived distributive justice, and perceived organizational support on employee engagement in Indian IT companies. While validating the construct in non-Western contexts, Shimazu *et al.* (2008) validated UWES measures, showing cultural variations in dedication and vigor (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2017). Niraula *et al.* (2025) successfully validated the employee engagement construct through UWES in the Nepalese context.

According to the report of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the African Region (2025), resource and community involvement were found to be critical determinants of engagement. Research conducted in Turkey and Kenya found organizational support and resource constraints as critical predictors of engagement (Karatepe, 2013). Sangong *et al.* (2025) found in African healthcare studies that engagement is effective when local communities are central to agenda-setting and resource availability. According to Rojas (2020), workplaces in Latin America prioritize national culture, relational frameworks, and interpersonal integration, which enhances inclusion and trust that are central to the impacts of engagement. A study in the Middle East, including Jordan and the Gulf, prioritized cultural values and informal networks, which Horak *et al.* (2025) found to play a positive role in sustaining engagement. A recurring challenge in measurement and validation issues is the reliance of the employee engagement construct on Western-developed scales. Cross-cultural validation literature shows that UWES requires adaptation to ensure measurement invariance across cultures (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2025). Approximately one and a half decades later, Schaufeli *et al.* (2017) introduced and validated the UWES-3, an ultra-short measure across South Africa, Japan, Spain, and Finland, showing acceptable reliability but demonstrating cultural differences in outer loadings.

The methodological trends in non-Western studies show a clear dominance of quantitative research, particularly in the fields of banking and information technology. While there are some studies that utilize qualitative methods, their numbers are limited. Additionally, non-Western studies are shaped by cultural factors such as collectivism,

power distance, and religious values. However, there is a noticeable absence of longitudinal studies, which contributes to a significant gap in the existing literature.

Table 1

Summary of Employee Engagement Studies in Non-Western Contexts

Country/Region	Sector	Framework/approach	Key findings	Gaps/limitations
China	Hotel	Job Demand-Resource model (JD-R)	Engagement linked to empowering leadership and psychological empowerment (Wen <i>et al.</i> , 2023).	Reliance on Western scales; limited longitudinal studies.
India	IT	Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Engagement linked to job crafting, psychological ownership, and organizational citizenship behavior (Goyal <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	Mostly reliance on Western scales; limited longitudinal studies.
Nepal	Banking	Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Engagement linked to training effectiveness, managerial support, and job alignment (Niraula <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	Relied on Western scales (UWES); limited cross-sectional studies.
Nepal	11Banking	Social Exchange Theory (SET)	Engagement linked to career development and training and development (Niraula <i>et al.</i> , 2025a),	Relied on Western scales (UWES); limited cross-sectional studies.
Turkey	Manufacturing	Social Interaction Theory/Social Exchange Theory	Inclusive leadership is a strong predictor of engagement, and psychological safety mediates the link (Aslan <i>et al.</i> , 2021).	Industry-specific; lacks generalizability.
Japan	Mental health (Public sector)	Psychological safety theory	Psychological safety mediated the relationship between humble leadership and the employee engagement and mental health (Kumagaya <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	Relied on Western scales, limited cross-sectional studies.
Indonesia	Literature review	Job Demand-Resource model, Social Exchange Theory, and Psychological Capital Theory.	Enduring engagement requires more than favorable job design or supportive exchanges. Psychological Capital functions as a pivotal mechanism that transforms organizational resources and social reciprocity into long-term, resilient engagement (Savitri and Santoso, 2026).	This conceptual model requires empirical testing across diverse organizational contexts.
Vietnam	Small and medium-sized enterprises	Job Design-Resource model	Gen-AI usage positively influences job performance and engagement (Vuong, 2026).	Relied on Western scales, limited cross-sectional studies.
Ghana	Local government	Authentic Leadership Theory	Positive and significant role of authentic leadership style in fostering employee engagement and	Authentic leadership may not be universally

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Middle East and North Africa	Organizational behavior and business ethics	Justice theory	shaping the work environment (Dartey-Baah <i>et al.</i> , 2025). Trust and commitment, favor exchange for mutual benefit, and satisfaction and gratitude are the drivers of employee engagement (Horak <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	valued across all cultural contexts. Fragmented evidence; underexplored public sector
South Africa	Coal-mining sector	Job Demand-Resource model	Authentic leadership enhance work engagement (WE), both directly and indirectly via psychological empowerment (PE).	Reliance on Western scales (UWES), limited cross-sectional studies.
UAE	Aviation industry	Trait Activation Theory and Job Design-Resource model	Engagement linked to trait of curiosity on proactive personality. (AlShamsi <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	Reliance on Western scales; limited cross-sectional studies.
Pakistan	Service sector	Social Identity Theory	Engagement linked to empowering leadership through the mediation of organizational identity (Arshad <i>et al.</i> , 2022).	Reliance on Western scales; limited cross-sectional studies.
Jordan	Hospitality	Authentic Leadership Theory	Engagement linked to authentic leadership (Assi <i>et al.</i> , 2024).	Reliance on Western scales (UWES), limited cross-sectional studies.
Iran	Hospitality	Psychological Empowerment Theory (PET)	Engagement linked to leader empowering behaviors and psychological empowerment (Hashemi <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	Reliance on Western scales (UWES 9), limited cross-sectional studies.
Ethiopia	Corporate entrepreneurship	Social Exchange Theory	Engagement linked to corporate entrepreneurship, innovation and capability and competence (Kassa and Tsigu, 2022).	Resource Based View (RBV), no standardized measurement scales were applied.
Nigeria	Education	Social Exchange Theory	Engagement linked to training and development and career development (Nasidi <i>et al.</i> , 2020).	Reliance on Western scales (Gallup, 2002), limited cross-sectional studies.
Turkey	Education	Social Exchange Theory	Engagement linked to career development and normative commitment as a mediator (Bekmezci <i>et al.</i> , 2022).	Reliance on Western scales ((Schaufeli <i>et al.</i> , 2006)), limited cross-sectional studies.
Ghana	Hotel industry	Social embedded model	Engagement linked to multitasking, usually feel more engaged and learn	Reliance on Western scales

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			more at work if training programs designed well and vice-versa for ineffective training programs designs (Gyensare <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	(UWES 9), limited cross-sectional studies.
India	IT sector	Social Exchange Theory	Engagement linked to employee voice and employee mental health (Khan <i>et al.</i> , 2026).	Reliance on Western scales; limited cross-sectional studies.
Jordan	Industrial business	Social Learning and Self Determination Theory	Employee engagement linked to ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility (Altahat, 2026).	Reliance on Western scales; limited cross-sectional studies.
Indonesia	Mining industry	Social Exchange Theory and Job Design-Resource model	Engagement linked to job characteristics and organizational commitment (Baiquni and Lizar, 2020).	Reliance on Western scales (UWES), limited cross-sectional studies.
Cameroon	Hospital industry	Job Demand-Resource model (JD-R) and Conservation of Resources (COR)	Engagement linked to psychological capital on problem- focus coping and job performance (Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2024).	Reliance on Western scales, limited cross-sectional studies.
China	Service industry	Employee Engagement Theory (Kahn, 1990) and multiple other theories	Engagement linked to innovative work behavior and work-life balance (Ali <i>et al.</i> , 2022).	Reliance on Western scales (UWES 9), limited cross-sectional studies.
<i>Note:</i> Authors work				

Methodology

Search strategy

This study ensures comprehensive coverage of employee engagement research in non-Western contexts. A systematic literature search was conducted across multiple databases, which include Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, PsycINFO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. The search was supplemented with regional journals and practitioner reports to capture those studies that may not be indexed in global databases. Moreover, the following instruments of research were used to search the related literature on employee engagement. Keywords used: employee engagement, work engagement, job engagement, workplace commitment; combined with regional and geographical identifiers—Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Nepal, India, Brazil, etc.; and boolean operators were extensively applied, including combinations such as “employee

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engagement” AND Asia, “work engagement” AND Africa, and “employee engagement.” Work engagement NOT manufacturing, etc., was extensively applied.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion

Peer reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and dissertations published between 2020-2025 and early 2026. Research and empirical studies conducted in non-Western countries or explicitly comparing Western and non-Western contexts. This study Included empirical studies regardless of whether they used quantitative, qualitative, as well as theoretical papers addressing employee engagement, job engagement, work engagement etc.

Exclusion

The studies exclusively focused on Western contexts; the manuscripts lacking empirical or theoretical grounding, such as opinion pieces, practitioner blogs, and published in social media; and those papers that were not available in English unless translated were excluded.

Screening process

Initial search yielded approximately 40 articles. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. Full-text reviews were conducted to ensure alignment with inclusion criteria. Reference lists (snowball technique) of key manuscripts were assessed to identify additional studies.

Data extraction

For every study, the following information was extracted and tabulated: Author(s), country/region, and year of publication; sector and industry studied; theoretical framework applied in their respective studies; methodology undertaken for the study, such as survey, interview, case study, etc.; key findings; and limitations as noted by authors.

Synthesis and approach applied

A narrative synthesis was adopted to integrate across diverse contexts. Conducted studies were grouped by: region/geographical area; sectors such as IT, banking, healthcare, hospitality, government, etcetera; frameworks—Social Exchange Theory, Job Design-Resource model, Self-Determination Theory, etc. We made extensive comparisons between Western literature and non-Western insight focus on convergences,

divergences, and cultural impacts. We demonstrated the trends and gaps and analyzed the data presented in Table 1.

Results and findings

Search results

We conducted a systematic search across various databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, yielded 40 studies. After screening the articles' metadata including titles, abstracts, and full texts, 25 studies met the inclusion criteria. These studies spanned diverse non-Western regions, which include Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, and covered sectors such as information technology, banking, healthcare, education, and government organizations.

Regional distribution

The largest share of empirical research studies is conducted and originated from China, India, and Japan, with a growing body of literature and work from Nepal and other Southeast Asian countries. In Africa, research was concentrated in South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria, generally focusing on sectors such as healthcare, public administration, banking, and the hospitality industry. When mentioning the studies conducted in Latin America, fewer were found in Brazil and Mexico, which led to practitioners' surveys and organizational case studies. In the Middle East, researchers found studies from Turkey, Jordan, and Gulf countries that emphasized the influence of culture and institutions on engagement.

Table 2

Name of used journals and their SCImago ranks

S. No	Name of journals	Rankings	No. of articles
1	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	SJR 2.158	1
2	Asia Pacific Journal of Business Administration	SJR 0.961	2
3	International Journal of Human Capital in Urban Management	SJR 0.180	1
4	International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy	SJR 0.517	1
5	European Journal of Training and Development	SJR 0.872	1
6	The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business	SJR 2.74	1
7	International Review of Public Administration	SJR 0.353	1
8	International Journal of Organizational Analysis	SJR 0.869	1
9	Computers in Human Behavior	SJR 2.923	1
10	Industrial and Commercial Training	SJR 0.575	1
11	Journal of Business Ethics	SJR 3.039	1
12	Journal of General Management	SJR 0.390	1
13	Management Decision	SJR 1.028	1
14	BMC Nursing	SJR 1.272	2
15	Nursing Forum	SJR 0.972	1

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16	International Journal of Organizational Analysis	SJR 0.869	1
17	Periodica Polytechnica Social and Management Sciences	SJR 0.209	1
18	International Journal of Intellectual Discourse	SJR 0.132	1
19	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	SJR 1.969	1
20	Humanities and Social Sciences Letters	SJR 0.181	1
21	Frontiers in Psychology	SJR 0.817	1
22	Frontiers in Psychology	SJR 0.872	1

Note: Created by authors

Sectoral trends

Engagement is linked to supervisory support, organizational justice, and human resource development practices in the sector of banking and finance (Niraula *et al.*, 2026; Gyensare *et al.*, 2025; Nasidi *et al.*, 2020), which are crucial for fostering a positive work environment and enhancing employee satisfaction and productivity. In information technology services, engagement is driven by employee voices and employee mental health (Khan *et al.*, 2026), recruitment and selection, training and competitive awards, career advancement, and employee involvement (Goyal *et al.*, 2023), job crafting, psychological ownership, and organizational citizenship behavior (Goyal *et al.*, 2025). In the healthcare sector engagement is linked to psychological safety, humble leadership, and mental health (Kumagaya *et al.*, 2025); psychological capital with problem focus, coping, and job performance (Chen *et al.*, 2024); and leaders' empowering behaviors and psychological empowerment (Hashemi *et al.*, 2025). In the hospitality sector, engagement is driven by multitasking and effective training programs (Gyensare *et al.*, 2025) and employee leadership and psychological empowerment (Wen *et al.*, 2023). In education and government services, engagement is linked to training and development and career development (Nasidi *et al.*, 2020), career development and normative commitment (Bekmezci *et al.*, 2022), and authentic leadership style and shaping the work environment (Dartey-Baah *et al.*, 2025).

Theoretical frameworks

According to Aliyev (2020), power distance, individualism, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance provide a robust theoretical framework for understanding how national cultural values shape employee engagement patterns in emerging markets. Researchers Yan *et al.* (2023) noted that a conflict might arise between autonomy and flat organizational structures, as high power distance cultures focus on authority and prevalent norms. Bakker and Damrouti (2007) emphasized that employee well-being and performance are impacted by the interaction between job demands (workloads and strain) and job resources (autonomy and supports), which influence employee engagement. Saks

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(2006) explained the necessity of Social Exchange Theory, which states that an employee's method of reciprocating available resources and fairness determines their level of engagement. In the absence of support and justice, employees withdraw effort, which disrupts the exchange relationship between employer and employees. According to Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), Organizational Support Theory emphasizes how employees perceive their value and care within the organization. Research conducted in Asian and African contexts shows that perceived organizational support is a strong predictor and moderator/mediator of employee engagement (Niraula *et al.*, 2025; Otoo & Rather, 2024). Researchers Horak *et al.* (2025) emphasized that local models of engagement incorporate cultural factors such as power distance, collectivism, informal networks, and relational ties as drivers of employee engagement that challenge the Western assumptions.

Measurement practices

Most of the studies on engagement rely on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) developed these scales to measure vigor, dedication, and absorption. These instruments confirmed reliability but indicated cultural nuances in interpreting the items. The UWES-9 scale was validated among Chinese undergraduates, which focused on the need for adapting engagement items in various cultural contexts (Wei *et al.*, 2025). Thiessen (2023) emphasized that cultural factors such as collectivism, cultural rituals, and informal networks play important roles in engagement, which remained underdeveloped and less widely validated in Western contexts.

Key findings

Engagement is consistently linked to training and development, career development, performance feedback, retention, well-being, etc., but the drivers of engagement vary by context. In non-Western settings, supervisory support, organizational justice, and resource availability were more significant. Cultural values such as collectivism, hierarchy, and religious norms significantly shape engagement experience in non-Western contexts. Evidence remains fragmented, with limited longitudinal and cross-regional comparative studies.

Discussion

This study affirms that the concept of employee engagement is continuously and consistently associated with employee performance, retention, and well-being. The collections and analysis of various studies found that the drivers of employee engagement

differ across cultures and organizational contexts. We found that studies conducted in Western contexts focused on autonomy, justice, and supervisory support; the same studies conducted in non-Western contexts point out the importance of collectivism, authority, hierarchy, and relational networks, which focus on making their engagement strategies fit the local cultures and values. The western-centric studies emphasized autonomy and job crafting as drivers of engagement; they further focused on personal resources such as self-efficacy and resilience as the key contributors for persistence and engagement. Researchers such as Bakker and Demerouti (2008) and Saks (2006) always claimed that the motivational pathway of the JD-R model and individual agency play an important role in engagement in Western contexts. In non-Western contexts, training and development, career development, performance feedback are identified as key antecedents of employee engagement (Niraula *et al.*, 2026; Nasidi *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, innovative work behavior and work-life balance (Ali *et al.*, 2022), psychological capital and job performance (Chen *et al.*, 2024), ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility (Altahat, 2026), employee voice and employee mental health (Khan *et al.*, 2026), as well as leaders' empowering behavior and psychological empowerment (Hashemi *et al.*, 2025) also contribute to employee engagement. The divergence suggests that cultural values strongly influence the engagement process in non-Western contexts.

According to Hofstede (2011), the collectivism principle in non-Western countries emphasizes group harmony, which in turn makes relational support more influential. Focusing on hierarchy in non-Western contexts, researchers Farh *et al.* (2007) mentioned that hierarchical structures shape employees' interpretation of autonomy and development. Similarly, researchers House *et al.* (2004) noted that in societies having high power distance, engagement initiatives should respect authority and gradients to see how cultural norms shape employees' responses to practices of the organization, suggesting that organizations must tailor their approaches to align with these cultural expectations to enhance employee engagement effectively.

Numerous non-Western studies highlighted the influence of collectivist orientations, religious values, and power distance on employee engagement. The studies conducted in Nepal and India found a hierarchical organizational culture closely tied with employee engagement and the perceived fairness of supervisors' supportiveness (Niraula *et al.*, 2026; Goyal *et al.*, 2025), indicating that employees in these cultures may feel

more engaged when they perceive their supervisors as fair and supportive within the hierarchical structures. The research conducted in the Middle East by Horak *et al.* (2025) found informal networks and ethical norms were key to shaping employee engagement. Similarly, the research conducted in African organizational settings found the traits of curiosity and proactive personality affected employee engagement in the workplace (AlShamsi *et al.*, 2025). The unique interaction between employers and employees poses both opportunities and challenges to enhance employee engagement in other regions also, which requires navigating complex social dynamics and ethical views that may not exist in cultures that are more individualistic. Most of the studies undertaken for this study used Social Exchange Theory and Job Demand-Resource model as theoretical lenses to associate employee engagement with their predictors. The contextual factors are crucial for demonstrating the relevance of local findings and highlighting several issues related to Western-centric results. The western-centric research generally was not concerned about cultural factors and organizational settings, as the findings should reflect local culture because they demonstrate local cultural values such as collectivism, power distance, and hierarchical structures, which actually shape engagement antecedents, as the locally developed instruments and scales remain valid and reflective to the research where it is carried out rather than being an all-size-fits-strategy approach.

Limitations

The review identifies several limitations that impact the interpretation of its findings. First, it primarily depends on studies published in English and indexed in major databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The heavy reliance on Western literature could lead to the exclusion of papers published in regional and local language journals, which contributes to the underrepresentation of indigenous contexts. Secondly, this study found publication bias, as there were peer-reviewed journals and articles that constituted the core of this review, ignoring practitioners' reports, local dissertations, and unpublished materials and studies of local evidence that can limit the breadth of evidence considered. This paper found regional imbalances in publications, as in the non-Western context, there was a significant number of published materials from Asia and Africa, whereas the very few studies were found from Latin America and the Middle East, which obviously restricts the findings' generalizability in non-Western contexts. The fourth limitation was about methodology constraints; the study found that most studies had used cross-sectional survey-based

designs, which limits causal inference between variables. The longitudinal study and mixed methods were not found to be applied while conducting research. The fifth limitation concerned measurement issues; most of the research conducted used Western-developed scales and instruments, such as UWES, which raises concerns about cultural validity, especially in the absence of locally developed measures. The scarcity of locally developed measures leads to wrong interpretations of engagement in non-Western contexts. At last, the sectors used in the study were mostly banking, IT, and healthcare institutions; ignoring other vital sectors such as public administration, education, agriculture, and local informal economies was not considered, which obviously limits the understanding of engagement in diverse organizational contexts and environments.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The dominance of Western models such as the Job Demands–Resources framework and Social Exchange Theory illustrates the importance of modification when applied in non-Western contexts. The literature in non-Western contexts includes collectivist values, hierarchical structures, and resources constraints; these factors generally shape how employees perceive and respond to various engagement initiatives, demonstrating that direct application of Western theories is inadequate and insufficient. The JD-R model and SET suggest integrating a universal principle that encompasses job resources and reciprocity between job demands and resources and both employers and employees. The components associated with these theories can shape broad insights on employee engagement and over reliance on Western developed scales and instruments can produce bias results ignoring locally developed scales, which may better reflect the unique cultural and contextual factors influencing employee perceptions in non-Western settings.

Practical implications

In non-Western contexts, effective HRD strategies must move beyond autonomy-based interventions common in Western settings and instead prioritize supervisor support, fairness, and inclusion. Resource allocation becomes particularly critical in environments with limited means, such as healthcare in Africa or public administration in South Asia, where engagement initiatives should emphasize adequate tools, training, and community support. Training leaders in hierarchical cultures to balance authority with relational trust, which strongly influences employee engagement,

is equally important. Moreover, sectoral tailoring is essential, since industries such as banking, IT, healthcare, and government each demonstrate distinct drivers of engagement, such as the need for innovation in IT, customer service in banking, patient care in healthcare, and public accountability in government. Taken together, these approaches highlight the importance of culturally sensitive and context-specific strategies for fostering sustainable employee engagement.

Policy implications

In non-Western contexts, local HRD models can significantly integrate employee engagement into development policies that emphasize supervisor training, organizational justice, and overall employee well-being. The local and regional organizations must further motivate to use cross-cultural benchmarking, which enables comparative papers that foster knowledge exchange and pinpoint best practices across different countries. Local government institutions may also leverage understandings of engagement to drive public sector reforms, particularly in administration and education, where engagement levels are low, as well as in service delivery within the regions. While designing HR policies by the organization in non-Western contexts, it should avoid uniform strategies that can illustrate the value of embedding engagement in local and global agendas to make sure of local adoption and international coherence, such as tailoring policies to reflect cultural values and practices that resonate with the local workforce.

Research implications

Future research on employee engagement in non-Western contexts should adopt longitudinal designs to track its dynamics over time and reveal how engagement evolves in response to cultural and organizational changes. Comparative studies between Western and non-Western samples are also essential to distinguish universal drivers, such as job resources, from context-specific ones rooted in collectivism or hierarchical norms. Underexplored sectors—including education, agriculture, and informal economies—require greater scholarly attention, as engagement in these areas remains poorly understood despite their societal importance.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the review highlights important limitations that shape the interpretation of its findings and point to directions for future research. The reliance on English-language publications indexed in major databases may have excluded valuable studies in local languages or regional journals, thereby underrepresenting indigenous

perspectives. Evidence of publication bias further narrows the scope, as peer-reviewed articles dominate while practitioner reports, dissertations, and unpublished work remain underrepresented. Regional imbalance is also evident, with Asia and Africa contributing more studies compared to Latin America and parts of the Middle East, restricting generalizability across non-Western contexts. Methodological constraints, particularly the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs, limit causal inference, while longitudinal and mixed-method approaches remain rare. Measurement issues persist due to reliance on Western-developed scales such as the UWES, raising concerns about cultural validity in non-Western settings where indigenous measures are scarce. Finally, sectoral representation is uneven, with banking, IT, and healthcare dominating the literature, while public administration, education, agriculture, and informal economies are underexplored. Collectively, these limitations point to the need for more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and methodologically diverse research to advance a truly global understanding of employee engagement.

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