

## **HR Moderating HR: Critical link between Developmental HR Practices and work engagement in a Moderated Model**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This conceptual paper sheds light on the concept of work engagement. Employees engaged in their work are bursting with energy, dedication and immersion in work. The article offers an overview of the concept of work engagement and the major gaps in its literatures, particularly in relation with developmental HRM (employee training and career development) practices. The evidences quoted in the review have indicated towards the critical*

*significance of HRM practices on work engagement. Notably, the review also provides adequate support towards the potential moderating role of performance appraisal perceptions upon developmental HRM and work engagement relationships.*

**Keywords:** Developmental HRM, Employee Training, Career Development, Performance Appraisal, Work Engagement.

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## INTRODUCTION

Work engagement is an evolving notion in the area of occupational health psychology (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008). The concept was first coined by nearly 25 years ago by Kahn (1990) who conceptualized it as the psychological, cognitive and emotional attachment of employee with the work. Bundles of empirical studies have been conducted outlining the numerous antecedents of work engagement (Bakker, 2011; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Schaufeli, 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2009). Sadly, despite of dozens of these studies, the human resource management and its major factors seem to have been rarely studied (Albrecht et al., 2015; Suan & Nasrudin, 2014; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). The main purpose of the current article is to underline critical imparity of HRM components, particularly on the development HRM (Kuvaas, 2008) practices. Through empirical evidence, the present paper underlines gaps in work engagement literatures concerning to HRM. Accordingly, the paper highlights theoretical, practical and empirical significance of developmental HRM practices including employee training opportunities and career

development opportunities towards the prediction of work engagement followed by the buffering energy of performance appraisal perceptions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Work Engagement**

Bakker (2011) in his article asks to recall someone whom they met at the workplace and found explaining things with energy and passion or individuals striving to give their utmost to serve in the best way possible. All such people were engaged with their work. They were completely attached with their job roles and experienced full immersion in their job activities. According to the most popular definition on work engagement by Schaufeli et al., (2001), work engagement is a positive work based mindset which brings energy, dedication, and absorption in work. Engaged workers are more productive and open to learning in order to go an extra mile. Kahn (1990) is ranked as the pioneer in the engagement literatures who explained engagement as individuals being physically, cognitively and emotionally connected to the work.

Work engagement is principally different from other employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Bakker, 2011; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). The JD-R model of work engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001) is the most established framework on the topic according to which, job resources and job demands are principally the core components that influence employees` work engagement. Job resources are those motivational aspects at work that enhance employees` work well-being whereby, job demands are work stressors that potentially drain individual capabilities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

### **HRM and Employee Behavior at Work**

Notable scholars in the area have outlined several antecedents of work engagement (Hamed, 2010; Saks, 2006). Alongside this, empirical evidence has also pointed out towards the significance of human resource management practices and their role towards developing strategies for enhancing employee behaviors and outcomes at work (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). HRM and its prominence in predicting different outcomes including employee learning, productivity, employee commitment, and operational performance are evident from the previous studies (Chand, 2010; Ozola, 2014; Lamba & Chaudhary, 2013; Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003; Ouedraogo, 2010).

Shuck, Rocco, and Albornoz (2012) have highlighted that there is a need for HR practitioners to understand how employees' work engagement could be enhanced through core HR practices and functions. Suan and Nasrudin (2014) stated that engagement has mainly been investigated through job and personal characteristics hence; the monumental role of HR seems to be scarce in empirical documents. Review by Albrecht et al., (2015) also asserts that HRM practices needs to be taken to an advanced level in order to embed engagement in more HR procedures and policies. The authors have indicated towards the potential of core HR practices in harnessing work engagement. Purcell (2014) also highlights towards the ambiguous relationship between HRM practices and work engagement. Schaufeli (2012) has directed in his review towards the importance of HRM components in enhancing work engagement whilst underlining the dearth of research in this context. The author has also highlighted that employee training and career development opportunities have a developmental nature due to which they can work as healthy job resources to enhance employee work well-being (engagement).

Conclusively, this takes to infer that HRM functions could be of great prominence in enhancing work engagement. Kuvaas (2007; 2008) has empirically underlined the potential of employee training opportunities and career development opportunities in fostering employee outcomes. The study has concluded that these HR factors are associated with employee nurturing and hence boosts employee work well-being. Likewise, study by Alfes, Shantz, and Truss (2012) also indicates employee training opportunities and career development opportunities as critical for enhancing work perceptions and outcomes which results in giving a boost to their skills, capabilities and potential for performance.

### **Employee Training and Work Engagement**

According to Kuvaas (2008), employee training is employee perception regarding the trainings provided and training needs supported by the HRM practices. Costen and Salazar (2013) indicated that employee training opportunities in an organization are planned and implemented to impart skills that are essential for the workforce to perform effectively and efficiently. In other words, this indicates towards the alignment of individual skill set with organization's needed skill set through training so that they could perform as expected. Employee Training has been studied and closely linked to numerous employee outcomes and behaviors including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior (Kuvaas, 2008; Costen & Salazar, 2013; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2008; Al-Emadi & Marquardt, 2007). Thus, adequate employee training opportunities can make a healthy impact on the employee outcomes and behaviors. This also leads to understand that employee training can influence and boost numerous employee aspects.

In connection to work engagement, very limited studies could be traced thus, outlining a gigantic research gap on the

relationship. Salanova, Agut, and Peiro (2005) examined the influence of employee training on hotel employees' work engagement and found a positive association link between the two. The study has recommended further investigation on the matter for better generalizable results. Accordingly, Suan and Nasurdin (2014) investigated and found significance impact of employee training on work engagement. The authors have also made strong recommendations for further research due to lack of study. There are other numerous HR factors that could enhance work engagement and employee training is one of them, Rothmann and Rothmann (2010) empirically recommends. The study further highlights lack of investigation and encourages future researchers for responsive investigation in this regard.

Ahmed, Phulpoto, Umrani, and Abbasi (2015) in their recent review have indicated towards the importance of employee training function by critically linking every sub-components of the functions with overall employee work well-being. The authors have outlined that significance of employee training opportunities cannot be ignored particularly, when it comes to enhancing their psychological development to foster work engagement.

Critical evaluation of this suggests that employee training could be of paramount significance for fostering work engagement. The evaluation also suggests that positive perception about employee training opportunities can help businesses to achieve their broader goals more effectively. Sadly, limited empirical attention has been paid towards this relationship which the current study also indicates for future consideration.

### **Career Development Opportunities and Work Engagement**

Career prospects at the workplace are becoming increasingly important due to rise in the employees pertaining to their career growth and success up the ladder. Career development

opportunities refer to employee view about the extent to which the organization is concerned about the career developments of the employees (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Critical appraisal of the literature has underlined strong relationship between career development opportunities and performance, career orientation, proactive work behavior, career satisfaction (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2013; Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Aryee & Chen, 2004; Crawshaw, Dick, & Brodbeck, 2012). Parallel to this, popular review on work engagement have also indicated towards its significance in predicting work engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011). The authors have also highlighted that similar to other HR functions, career development opportunities is also new in the work engagement literatures and hence, there is a big research gap.

Review of the literature further testifies what Gruman and Saks (2011) asserted as, there are very limited studies available on this relationship. Study by Poon (2013) examined and reported positive association between career development opportunities and work engagement. The study concluded that availability of different career growth and success paths were found to be boosting employees' work well-being thus, resulting in their engagement at work. James, McKechnie, and Swanberg (2011) in their study on the retail workforce found a strong connection between career development opportunities and work engagement. The study also indicated towards shortage of research and need for further attention in this regard. Similar results were also reported by Barbier et al., (2013).

Critical review outlines that there is a potential link between career development opportunities and work engagement which sadly has not received thorough empirical attention till date. This again points towards the lack of focus of engagement scholars on HRM as potential predictors of work engagement. Poon (2013) has stated that career development opportunities induce feelings

of value and importance in an organization which motivates employees to work with more vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Studies like Hansez, Chmiel, and Demerouti (2013) and Rothman and Joubert (2007) have also underlined the importance of career development opportunities alongside lack of research in this regard. Conclusively, it could be asserted that career development opportunities can have a remarkable impact on employees' well-being at work (work engagement) and organizations need to realize and understand its strategic significance so that they could drive their workforce towards competitive achievement of their strategic goals.

### **Performance Appraisal Perceptions**

Cheung and Law (1998) have described performance appraisal as the consistent observation and comparison of employee performance against established work based standards. According to Erdogan (2002), performance appraisal can be described as the procedure through which performance standards are established and assessment of behaviors is done in order to measure performance for employee assessment. There is no doubt in the fact that performance appraisal is one of the highly significant components of HRM with the predicting power of numerous employee behaviors (Dusterhoff, Cunningham, & MacGregor, 2014). According to them, satisfied employees with performance appraisals works critically well for enhancing employee behaviors. Performance appraisal process is primarily for administrative aims to evaluate employees' performance to make future decisions regarding pay rise, promotion, job responsibility and other fringe benefits (Cawley et al., 1998). Haynes and Fryer (2000) have argued that positive perception about performance appraisal indicate value and recognition of work related efforts to the employees which hence can foster their



outcomes and behaviors and work. Henceforth, they are termed with great importance in the employee circle. Moreover, they help them in valuating what has been of value and what requires improvement; they get to understand what exactly they can work on to improve their engagement (Suan & Nasrudin, 2014).

Critical appraisal of the literature on work engagement managed to find out only two studies that have examined the importance of performance appraisal perceptions on work engagement (Suan & Nasrusin, 2014; Gupta & Kumar, 2012). Both the studies found a strong association of positive perception of employees' performance appraisal with work engagement. The authors have highlighted towards the potential yet, severe paucity of research on the relationship. Performance appraisal can boost employees' psychological well-being to commit with more energy, absorption and resilience at work.

Thus, it leads us to also understand what Kavanagh, Benson, and Brown (2007) that individuals believing performance appraisals to be fair can work with more effectiveness and acceptability. Cook and Crossman (2004) also highlighted the significance of employee perception pertaining to enhancing employee behaviors and outcomes. Conclusively, a strong link and association is expected between performance appraisal and work engagement.

### **Moderation of Performance Appraisal Perceptions**

A potential moderating variable can be introduced in a relationship where there is weak or inconsistent relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986), whereby, several studies have attempted to test moderating effects in studies relating to workplace and employee behaviors (Ando & Kim, 2006; Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009). In the views of Bakker (2011) that different job factors can moderate the influence of other job factors upon

work engagement. Under the premise of conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001), the availability of further resources can further maximize and enhance the use of other available resources to influence work well-being. Parallel to this, there are studies available that have investigated the moderation of different job factors upon the relationship of several other job factors with work engagement (Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009; Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2007). Critical review by Gruman and Saks (2011) has outlined performance appraisal and concerned employees' perception regarding them, to be of great value for enhancing work engagement. The authors have argued that due to the motivational potential of job factors like performance appraisal, the impact of available job resources can be buffered.

Similarly, leaders and management personnel are critically involved in performance appraisals (Elicker, Levy, & Hall, 2006), and based on this, positive perception about performance appraisal could potentially make them feel valued, recognized and energizing them to make the most of other job base HR factors like employee training opportunities and career development opportunities. Therefore, the current study proposes the potential of positive performance appraisal perceptions to not only influence employees' work engagement but also moderate the relationship of employee training opportunities and career development opportunities upon work engagement.

The article thus, asserts that the availability of employee training opportunities and career development opportunities will positively predict work engagement and, positive perception of about performance appraisal would further enhance employees' willingness to capitalize upon these resources hence fostering their impact and relationship upon work engagement. This

proposition is also in parallel with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001) on how some resources can moderate the relationship of other available resources on work engagement.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

### Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework indicates towards the significance and potential of performance appraisal perceptions in

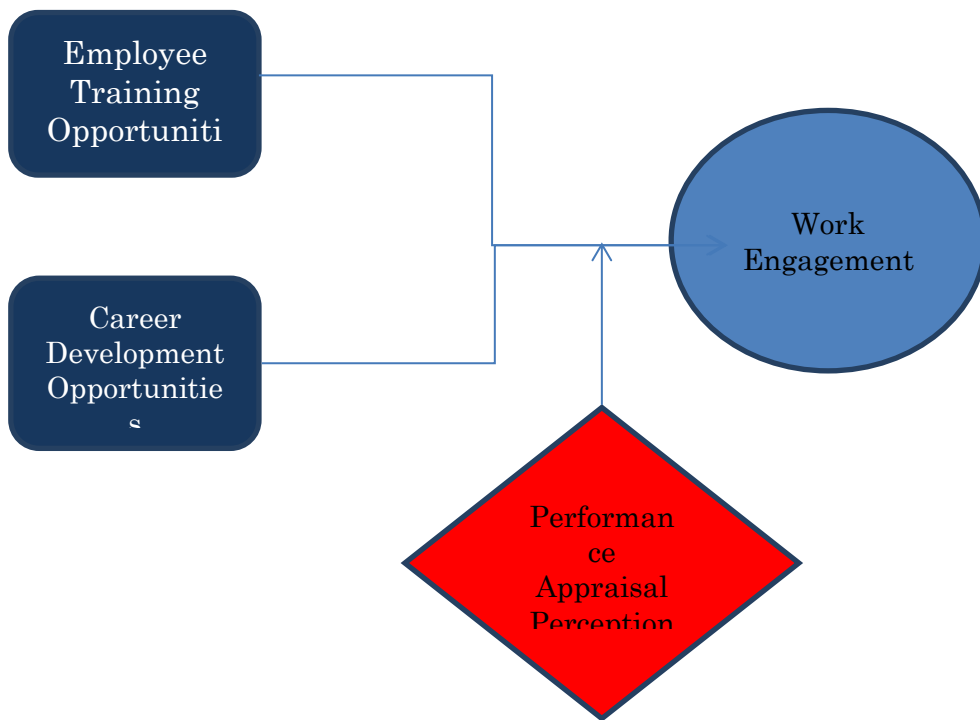


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

moderating the impact of employee training opportunities and career development opportunities upon work engagement. The framework marks towards a critical gap in work engagement literatures and hence pioneers to be the first to propose this moderation.

### **Gaps and Contributions of the Study**

Through this article, the authors have strived to shed light on numerous research, theoretical, and practical gaps. The paper has indicated towards the significance of HR factors that are associated with the development of employees (Kuvaas, 2008) upon work engagement. Accordingly, the paper also underlines towards the significance yet, paucity of research on employee training opportunities and career development opportunities in predicting work engagement. Ahmed et al., (2015) and Salanova, Agut and Peiro (2005) have indicated towards the importance yet paucity of research on employee training opportunities and work engagement relationship. Similarly, Poon (2013), Barbier et al., (2013) and James, Mckechnie and Swanberg (2011) have also underlined towards the importance of career developmental opportunities along with severe scarcity of research on its relationship with work engagement. This paper thus proposes and highlights the critical need for urgent empirical attention in predicting work engagement. Accordingly, the paper also indicates towards the empirical significance of performance appraisal perceptions in predicting work engagement.

The article also indicates towards severe paucity of research and a strong potential in enhancing work engagement. On a major note, the article indicates towards the alternative relationship between employee training opportunities and career development opportunities and work engagement. The article

proposes the potential moderation of performance appraisal on these relationships which has never been tested before.

## CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper has attempted to critically outline how developmental HR practices can further work engagement. The proposed framework has remarkably underlined towards the significance and gaps in engagement literatures regarding employee training opportunities and career development opportunities. Notably, the paper has also proposed the moderation of performance appraisal perceptions with thorough literature justifications. In a nutshell, this conceptual paper of the current study has proposed a significantly contributing moderating framework with specialized focus on some of the notable HR practices through which organizational scientists could help enterprises learn ways to boost their employees' work engagement.

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