A review of employee engagement: Empirical studies

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ABSTRACT

Although many companies are modernizing by maximizing the use of technology, employee management remains an important topic, where employees are the creators of policies, procedures and business strategies. Having employees with high engagement is not easy for a company. So it is always interest to discuss the factors that influence employee engagement. This study aims to analyze the role of employee engagement as a discussion of human resource management, from Khan which focuses on the condition of human psychology, and how this view was developed in the following years by other researchers. This study uses literature study techniques using qualitative methods to describe the results in a narrative and aims to assist further research. The results showed that there was an increase in the engagement topic study. This proves that the management of human resources in an organization must be carried out with high flexibility, with regard to individual rights, by involving employees in organizational processes. Organizations will get high engagement from their employees if communication and relationships between employers and employees are done well, so that a positive perception is created. Engaged employees are an asset for the organization to achieve competitive advantage.

1. Introduction

In the 2000s most companies started to focus on both management systems and human resources since not only IT, but human resources also play an important role in the company to keep on surviving and adapting toward changes. The fact that human, as a resource, is crucial to work alongside other resources had by the company is proved by some researches done by Ployhart et al (2014) mentioned that employees are the most important asset; humans came to be regarded as an asset instead of a resource, ones that could be developed continuously, renewed, and protected (Bayraktar & Şencan, 2017); Whether it is people, workforce, intellectual capital, human capital, human resources, talent, or any other term, the resource contained in employees and their organization is increasingly recognized as critical to strategist and competitive advantage (Gabcanova, 2011). Human resource is asset for the company competitive advantage, so if the company wants to hold them tight, it is necessary to give the employees a push, stimulation and assurance that they are the integral part of the company. Managing people is a piece of art. Companies in the 21st century must be able to adopt technology and be innovative in managing employees, emphasis on artistic processes in strategic management and daily activities (Adler, 2006). People management is not easy. This is not an exact science. In fact, it is seen as an art that is mastered by people with experience. Managing human resource issues, people are the most important assets, how companies can maintain and employees have a positive perception of their workplace (Stockley, 2006).

The art mentioned above means that handling employees cannot be done in the same way from time to time, today the condition is totally different from what happened 10 years ago. The generation changes, we have what we called the millennial generation who will work as employees. Many companies nowadays do some development in their working atmosphere to

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match with millennial characteristics, for example Gojek is averagely dominated by 27-year-old employees. It applies the flexibility and office-hour free working culture. This company also gives the broader room for their employees to solve the problem in their own way with their own responsibility. Maintaining employees is becoming more difficult in a borderless world. Employees can engage only when the company creates a good corporate brand, ensuring that employees have a good job that makes it feel proud for the company. Employees have the opportunity to improve their experience, competence and quality. Psychological compensation must be given by the company, if not, the employee will resign (Narkhede & Joshi, 2014; Dongre & Narkhede, 2015). A company should understand well the needs of each employee since their needs are different from each other. It is necessary to understand the motivations and needs of employees and how these concepts relate to individual goals and behavior. Although all people have the same urges, they do not have the same emotional reactions (such as loneliness, curiosity, or anger) or needs in the same situation (McShane & Glinow, 2010). See Fig. 1.

The above figure explained that each employee is affected by self-concept, social norm and past experience in behaving and making decisions in which they have already been built up based on their primary and secondary need. The same concept works in the choice of employee’s engagement. Kahn (1990) defines engagement as the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles. In engagement, an employee expresses themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance. Engagement is a motivational construct. Another definition by Schaufeli et al. (2006) mentioned engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficiency. (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Engagement as a form of well-being has been defined by many authors (Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Gorgievski, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Rothbard & Patil, 2011; Albrecht, 2012; Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011; Mayo & Jackson, 2018).

This research was conducted by analyzing the results of the previous studies to make sure that the study about engagement experienced some kind of development. It develops from year-to-year along with the development of the employee’s need, complexity of the human basic need, employee’s generation, and disruption era that also change the environment and business atmosphere which are somehow unpredictable. Previously, engagement was the physical involvement, cognitive and emotion of the employee to their company (Kahn, 1990), but the following studies show that engagement is more than that. Some research that was conducted after 1990 can be used as the reference, so it is interesting to be studied deeply by using Khan’s study as the basis for the further studies. In the following there are some studies that were used as a reference by Kahn (1990) as the base of the studies which are the development of engagement research topics.

2. Literature Review

Researches used as references by Kahn (1990)


Researches done by Khan initiated by an opinion that each person can use his/her physical, cognitive and emotional ability to take part in achieving the maximum working performance that would be implicated in the working result and experience. By having those things mention previously, it can be concluded that engaged employee is determined by three physical conditions: meaningfulness, safety and availability. Some study tried a different concept with the previous studies which stated that a special condition of being engaged and disengaged was shown by the role of the employee related to the performance. The special condition here is the people’s emotional reaction to conscious and unconscious phenomena and the objective properties of jobs, roles and work contexts; the primacy of people’s experiences of themselves and their contexts as the mediator of people’s experience of themselves as their context; the mediator of the depths to which they employ and express or withdraw and defend themselves during role performance; and the self in role as the unit of analysis, a focus on how both person and role are enlivened or deadened during role performance. This study generated a conceptual model by developing more components than the previous ones. Khan seriously considered the chosen components and their effect on the personal, interpersonal, group, and intergroup and organization that creating a choice to be fully engaged or disengaged. Based on those components, the personal chooses to be fully engaged or modestly engaged toward their working role in a certain company. This study analyzed a person’s choice to be engaged or disengaged by understanding the motives behind the choice. It is like

![Fig 1. Drives, Needs, and Behavior](Source: McShane, et al., (2010))
using a camera by zooming the lenses to make the far object looks closer, so the unseen thing will be clearly shown, in this case is the reason of being engaged or disengaged.

Researches conducted after 1990

The researches in this period of time stated that engagement/disengagement is determined by the employee’s need on self-expression and self-employment (Abbas & Murad, 2012; Reeve & Lee, 2014), job involvement behavior (Engelbrecht & Heine, 2016; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Gorgievski, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Schaufeli, Shimazu, Hakanen, & Salanova, 2017; Schuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2010), intrinsic motivation (Sartono & Ardhani, 2015; Masvaure, Ruggunan, & Maharaj, 2014), meaningfulness (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004); creativity (Gichohi, 2014; Davis, 2007; Yoo & Jeong, 2017), emotional (Pilotti et al., 2017; Yoo & Jeong, 2017), commitment (Dajani, 2015; Albrecht, 2012; Nazir & Islam, 2017; Farndale et al., 2014), well-being (Guest, 2014; Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011; Scott-Jackson & Mayo, 2018; Schuck & Reio Jr, 2014; Joo & Lee, 2017; Hakanen & Peeters, 2018) work motivation and work satisfaction (Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Albrecht, 2012; Sartono & Ardhani, 2015; Masvaure et al., 2014; Farndale et al., 2014), performance (Guest, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Yongxing et al., 2017; Sendawula et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2012; Dajani, 2015), work life balance (Pandita & Singhal, 2017; Shekhar, 2016; Jaharuddin & Zainol, 2019; Larasati & Hasanati, 2018), corporate entrepreneurship (Afework & Raju, 2015; Bakytgul et al., 2019, Ghura & Goel, 2018; Dhanpat & Schachtebeck, 2019; Umar, Asif et al., 2018), psychological contract (Kasekende, 2016; Heshmati & Jed, 2015; Sharma & Garg, 2017; Naidoo et al., 2019), discretionary behaviors (Kasekende, 2016; Piychat et al., 2014); innovation (Jonas et al., 2018; Fatima & Khan, 2017); service climate (Fung et al., 2017; Menguc, 2017; Chaudhary et al., 2014; Salanova et al., 2005), service quality (Fung et al., 2017; Dharmaputra & Araun, 2017; Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Hapsari et al., 2016), organizational citizenship behavior (Farndale et al., 2014; Mathumbu & Dodd, 2013; Kataria et al., 2013; Shantz et al., 2015).

3. Methods

This study was done by applying the literature review based on the studies done by Kahn (1990). The researchers assumed that the study by Kahn (1990) is the starter of the development of studies focus on engagement topic. By using the qualitative method, this study described narratively as a hope to help in explaining the model and gives suggestion for the further researchers. The result shown in the conclusion is a result of reviewing some studies to be used as empirical reference (King & He, 2005). Generally, narrative explanation is criticized for being biased, so here, the study was done by following the systematic guideline of managements (Levy & Ellis, 2006; Tranfield et al., 2003; Webster & Watson, 2002). The guideline mentions the analysis steps that started by searching and identifying, next is aggregation- combining and grouping the identifying result-, and the last step is analyzing- determining the closest match of the theory and empirical review.

2. Processing

1. Input
   1. Know the literature
   2. Comprehend the literature
   3. Apply
   4. Analyze
   5. Synthesize
   6. Evaluate

3. Output

Fig. 2. Analysis steps
Source: Levy et al. (2006)

4. Results

Based on the analysis steps, the review started by doing identification toward some studies done by previous researchers. The engagement topic could be seen as having developed after the period of Khan’s study that was in 1990. Khan used the psychological approach by giving attention to a scientific study of body endurance to reach its optimal function (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This approach was done as an effort to add the focus of the traditional psychology, only focus on disease, organ damage, mental disorder and disability. This traditional psychological review was added with organizational psychology, by measuring the strength and ability of human resources to be positively developed and managed to increase working performance (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). The engagement study is getting evolved in which engagement is defined as the involved feeling of an employee toward his/her organization. Engaging here means being involved in terms of body, mind, and high sense of belonging toward the organization that makes the personal sometimes forgets the body endurance and leads to tiredness. Is an employee who experiences tiredness categorized as engaged? This is the debatable question that drives some studies to give more explanation on this presumption. Tiredness here is called burnout which is defined as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among professionals who work with other people in some capacity”. (Maslach, 1993). On the progress, there is a paradigm that occurred called The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The occurrence of this paradigm causes some arguments discussing the relation between burnout and engagement. The argument popped up after two study results which mentioned that the
purpose of the study was to measure the engagement. MBI mentioned that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (and in future it changed into exhaustion, cynicism, and professional inefficacy) as the measurement scale that stated by giving highest score of the negative answer if it was related to engagement (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Next, it was also claimed that giving the highest score of the answer was categorized as showing high efficacy and accomplishment at work, but without the existence of exhaustion or cynicism (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Then, the engagement measure was developed by using The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which explain that engagement as a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment with three dimensions of measurement: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Salanova et al., 2005; Schaufeli et al., 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2001). During the progress, engagement measurement by using MBI and UWES had no longer argued, whether MBI and UWES are opposite or stand by themselves, so if the research is purposed to measure engagement, it has directly mentioned to be applied by using MBI or UWES. Many researchers chose to use UWES as the measurement tool since it has a positive opinion toward engagement. If a person intentionally chose to be engaged, it is sure that he/she will do the work happily with high involvement and loyalty although he/she feels tired, it is seen as something usual during working time. Based on some studies conducted in Khan’s period, mostly used UWES with some kinds of development. It happened in line with the more complex phenomenon related to human resources: people change, human need and the development of technology. In the following are some developments in the result of the study about engagement using UWES as the measuring tool and some development items used as the additional parameter. It is considered as the second step, grouping the study results that have been done previously based on the additional parameter that given according to the purpose of the study that aimed to achieve.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Parameter</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation; psychological need</td>
<td>Human beings have different needs, so as the willing of being engaged and disengaged are affected by motivation, meaningfulness, safety and availability in specific situations. If they are not well managed, the person who chooses to be engaged will experience stress, alienation, dependency and deterministic utility for him/herself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job and personal resource; workaholism; workplace environmental</td>
<td>By adding some parameters in UWES (vigor, dedication, absorption) measurement, the workaholic employee is different from the engaged employee. Workaholic is assumed as a bad attitude (working excessively and working compulsively) while engagement is a positive attitude, it is more to passion for work. External influence gives a chance for an employee to engage, both in job resource and personal resource. Next is the workplace environment, in which for them working is a daily life like being together with the second family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation is more on the self-push, having interest, and doing for likeness not for money and status. Intrinsic motivation is not the trigger of employee engagement. The relationship is weak especially if there is no other stimulus. Some studies tried self-efficacy as the moderation. Although intrinsic motivation cannot be expected by the organization, an organization has to treat its employee respectfully and on the other hand, the employee has the moral responsibility toward the organization by giving loyalty and respect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity; innovation; organizational culture; learning process</td>
<td>Creativity mentioned as the personal ability to create something new that is beneficial in the long term for the organization as the competitive advantage. Creativity is identical with innovation. Creativity should be stimulated by the organization and generally related to organizational culture. Employees need to be involved from the beginning until the organizational outcome. It is done to give meaningful learning to build their knowledge and skills. The involvement is called creativity engagement where the employee has a chance to join in solving the problem, do an experiment, and create a new idea. Besides, interaction with more people will make the employees get used to accepting critique, suggestion, and marking during the process of developing creativity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Emotional is the individual reaction that shows the mood at the very moment, whether he/she is happy, sad, or annoyed. Emotional is the expression of feeling. Some studies mentioned above chose to use UWES measurement by adding some parameters, while in this study, the researcher used the psychological approach by Khan: psychological meaningfulness, psychological availability and psychological safety. The employee reaction is the form of positive emotion in which it can be formed, fixed and helps strengthen the relationship between the organization and the employees. Employees are not money machines but meaningful assets for the organization to respect and be appreciated based on their working performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment; organizational justice; organizational support; leadership, performance</td>
<td>Engagement as the moderating to arrive at the employee’s commitment to reach the performance. Employee engagement occurs when there is some stimulus to strengthen it such as fairness, organizational support, and a leader that gives room for the employee to do their duty and accept their right based on what they deserve. There are some other incentives that make the employees engaged with the organization such as compensation, employee improvement etc. Stated in some of the studies, when employees are engaged, they are more likely to be committed, Commitment is considered as the crucial organizational issue because commitment is the degree to which an employee is willing to exert energy and feel pride for being with the organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-being; job satisfaction; workplace environment; psychological capital; experience positive emotions.</td>
<td>Well-being as well as higher performance, commonly mentioned as employee happiness. Using a psychological approach, well-being occurs when the employees are satisfied with their work, by maximizing the psychological capital owned by the employee (self-efficacy, hope, resiliency, and optimism), so during doing the working they will get experience of positive emotion such as happiness, joy and enthusiasm. Employees in this condition are able to show high productivity because happiness is more sensitive to opportunities at work, more outgoing and helpful to others, and more confident and optimistic, and then they will transfer their engagement to others. Most time will be spent to work, there is a balance between working and leisure. Good working environment and support from organizations give chance to get employees who are engaged, do the work happily and a high sense of belonging to find new family in their working environment. Based on the study, it can improve individual and organizational performance and to enhance employees’ well-being.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work motivation; work satisfaction, productivity; initiative;</td>
<td>Initiative is the extent to which employees accept personal responsibility to be proactive to improve aspects of their work. Engagement in some research related to employee innovative and proactively seeking opportunities. Based on some studies that related to work motivation and satisfaction, not with the engagement. The productive employee has higher motivation in working and satisfied with the working but not engaged with the organization. The reason why the employee has no engagement is not clear but the prediction is: financial factor, business growth direction, future organization condition which make the employee always be ready in finding the best opportunity, resign and move to another organization that gives the longer future assurance. It affects the increase of employee turnover toward the organization.</td>
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workplace environment, organizational justice, organizational support, organizational culture, learning process, experience.

Next step is analyzing as the third step or the last step done in reviewing. Based on the reviewing that has been done previously, the topic of engagement is still popular and interesting to be conducted as a review (Farndale et al., 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Guest, 2014; McShane & Glinow, 2010). It is because employee engagement is seen as the cornerstone of high-performing organizations. Studies showed that employee engagement give long term positive effect and also being the excellence for the organizational competitive advantage (Heshmati & Jed, 2015). Positive perception and motivation of the employees about the organization where they work can be effective stimuli for engagement (Albrecht, 2012; Farndale et al., 2014; Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Masvaure et al., 2014; Sartono & Ardhani, 2015). Next, some support of the organization such as leadership, workplace environment, organizational justice, organizational support, organizational culture, learning process, experience can be the hope for the employee and value on the organizational management. The employee will consider to work longer in
the organization and reduce the turnover (Blau & Boal, 1987; Blau & Boal, 1989; Jahanuddin & Zainol, 2019; Mowday et al., 2013; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Organizations often mistakenly assume that employees have the same universal needs, beliefs and values. In fact, the involvement of employees depends on what is being needed at the time. Employees do it based on motives of need. Individual differences, circumstances and personal needs vary greatly (Maslow, 1954; McShane & Glinow, 2010). Organization should imply the open management system, the employees have the right to engage in all organization process, aside from building the relationship with the employee, identify the specific values from each employee, what their important thing is, directly or indirectly will make the employee feel that the organization pay attention to them, give them reward, support them as individual. The result of involving employees is the organization will find a strength had by each employee. The same level employee does not always have the same skill and competence, there will always be a difference such as habit and hobby that can be used to enhance the personal performance and the following result enhances the organization performance. For example, there is an employee who is a risk taker, while the others are not. The same case happens with creativity, initiative and innovation. They will not be the same to each other. The task for the organization is to guide all the excess had by the employees based on the necessity. If the employee is a risk taker, the organization can assign him/her to explore and evaluate the new technology that can be used to improve the internal organization stability such as social networking tools. Organization needs to spend some time having a discussion with the employees and with a little sacrifice will give a huge impact. It will lead to the pop up of innovation from the employee that will ease the organization do some innovation (Davis, 2007; Gichohi, 2014; Jonas et al., 2018; Fatima & Khan, 2017; Yoo & Jeong, 2017).

Modern organizations are full of employees from the millennial generation. The lifestyle and working style is different with the previous generations. The millennial is an open characteristic, spontaneous in telling opinions, both agree and disagree, and have less interest in spending most of the time working. They prefer to have a balanced life. They do not like a typical work that takes most of their time, while they want to enjoy certain time to do activities apart of working such as gathering with their family, doing hobbies, and other leisure activities. It becomes a challenge for the organization that they have to change their paradigm, working culture although the fact that the organization should follow the changes is unavoidable. For the millennial employees that have already adapted well with technology, IT makes their life easier and faster in finishing their work. Working does not always have to have a presence in the office, for them working can be everywhere and anywhere since IT makes the world have no limit. This fact results that this millennial is physically stronger, has less stress, works happily but still have high productivity (Jahanuddin & Zainol, 2019; Larasati & Hasanati, 2018; Shekhar, 2016; Pandita & Singhal, 2017). The highest engagement is when the employee is satisfied with the organization, show high commitment as part of the organization, show some behaviors that support the organization such as loyalty, discretion behavior, no interest in changing job, have citizenship behavior such as behave in both formal and informal way, proud being the part of the organization where they work for (Kasekende, 2016; Piyachat et al., 2014; Farndale et al., 2014; Mathumbu & Dodd, 2013; Kataria et al., 2013; Shantz et al., 2015).

5. Discussion, Implications and Limitations

In many organizations, employees are viewed as an asset to be managed rather than as individuals who can create the next innovation for success. Long-term engagement starts with good communication between employer and employees as well as among co-workers, fostering a positive working environment. Engagement researchers have shown increasing interest to achieve the company performance (Guest, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Yongxing et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2012; Dajani, 2015; Sendawula et al., 2018). A different level of analysis about a certain concept about hierarchical relationship occurs in all organizational phenomena which have a presence in nested arrangement. The study about engagement grows fast such as the topic that discuss about the relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance (Guest, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Yongxing et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2012; Dajani, 2015; Sendawula et al., 2018), employee engagement as the result of the work of the ones who are led. Each person in the crowd is not only expert in playing one instrument, but they also are able to work together creating harmony. The similar situation happens in an organization, it consists of a lot of people with their own ability in their own field that support the organization. Though, there is something that should be remembered by the organization is that each person contribute differently like an orchestra, though some people are not in the stage such as the ones in charge in providing consumption for the
Those are employees, they are assets (Stockley, 2006). Having employees that are engaged with the organization bring advantages to the organization, giving excellence to the company (Bakhtar & Şencan, 2017). Although there is a phenomenon that the place for human resources can be replaced by IT sophistication, human resources are still needed for certain types of job that cannot only depend on the database consisting of some orders without analysis.

The limit of this study is not completely accommodated with the research results that are used as the empirical study, there is a possibility that some results are not attached which probably are important to the development of the engagement topic. The limit as the researcher of the data source and searching method. Hopefully in the next study which has the same topic, the data can be fully accommodated to make a comprehensive analysis that can represent the review study and be used to answer some problem related to engagement.

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