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## Nature of Employee Engagement: Rethinking its Levels

## Charakter zaangażowania pracowników: ponowne przemyślenie jego poziomów

### Introduction

AON is a survey company, similar to Gallup, that conducts surveys on employee engagement. The United States has the most significant percentage of employee engagement, with 30% engaged, 52% disengaged, and 18% actively disengaged (Gallup, 2017). On a worldwide scale, AON (2018) reports that in

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2017, 27% of workers were highly involved, 38% were moderately engaged, 21% were inactive, and 14% were actively disengaged. Gallup (2017) reports that, at a global level, 13% of workers are engaged, 63% are disengaged, and 24% are actively disengaged. Examining the findings of the employee engagement survey leads to the fact that the results vary significantly across worldwide areas. East Asia has the lowest employee engagement rate globally, at 6%, less than half the world-wide average of 13%. (Gallup, 2017). In Australia and New Zealand, 24% of workers are engaged, 60% are disengaged, and 16% are actively disengaged (Gallup, 2017).

Except for charitable enterprises, one of the primary objectives is profit maximization — active disengagement results in a significant loss of profit in any company. Employee engagement has been shown to improve employee's job performance (Bulinska-Stangrecka et al., 2021; Bulinska-Stangrecka and Iddagoda, 2020; Anitha, 2014) and the financial performance of the company (Bulinska-Stangrecka and Iddagoda, 2020; Anitha, 2014, Sahoo and Sahu, 2009). Gallup (2017) writes: "U.S. active disengagement costs US\$450 billion to \$550 billion per year. In Germany, that figure ranges from €112 billion to €138 billion per year (US\$151 billion to \$186 billion). In the United Kingdom, actively disengaged employees cost the country between £52 billion and £70 billion (US\$83 billion and \$112 billion) per year."

Examination of previous studies highlighted that employee engagement has become a never-ending quest. Gallup, a research firm, says that in 2017, 38% of workers in Sri Lanka were engaged, 54% were disengaged, and 8% were actively disengaged. According to Gallup (2013), 14% of Sri Lankans were engaged, 62% were disengaged, and 23% were actively disengaged. While there has been an improvement, Sri Lanka still has a long way to go regarding employee engagement. Dharmasiri (2010) discusses employee engagement in general. It elucidates the theoretical underpinnings of employee engagement. Iddagoda and Opatha (2020) performed empirical research on management staff employee engagement in public listed companies. Iddagoda and Opatha (2017) highlighted several study gaps in the employee engagement literature. They address these gaps in the literature via their investigations of Iddagoda et al. (2016), Iddagoda and Opatha (2020), and Iddagoda and Gunawardana (2017).

Another pair of Sri Lankan researchers, Wickramasinghe and Perera (2014), discovered that organizational citizenship behaviour acts as a mediator

between perceived organizational support and quality performance and between employee engagement and quality performance. Exploring Employee Engagement is a monograph released in 2017 by the Postgraduate Institute of Management Sri Lanka (2017). It is an empirical study of employee engagement across six Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industries, including the polymer, banking, insurance, and finance. The sample size is 12 000, and the study is conducted on an individual executive and non-executive staff level.

When it comes to the international context, Schaufeli et al. (2009) give more priority to the human factors. According to them in order to increase engagement, reducing the exposure to job demands is not the best option. Resources are not only necessary to deal with job demands and to “get things done”, but they also are important in their own right because they increase work engagement was the view of Schaufeli et al. in 2009.

The general objective of this paper is to endeavour an introduction to employee engagement while addressing the conceptual confusions of employee engagement. The specific objective is to present the levels of employee engagement.

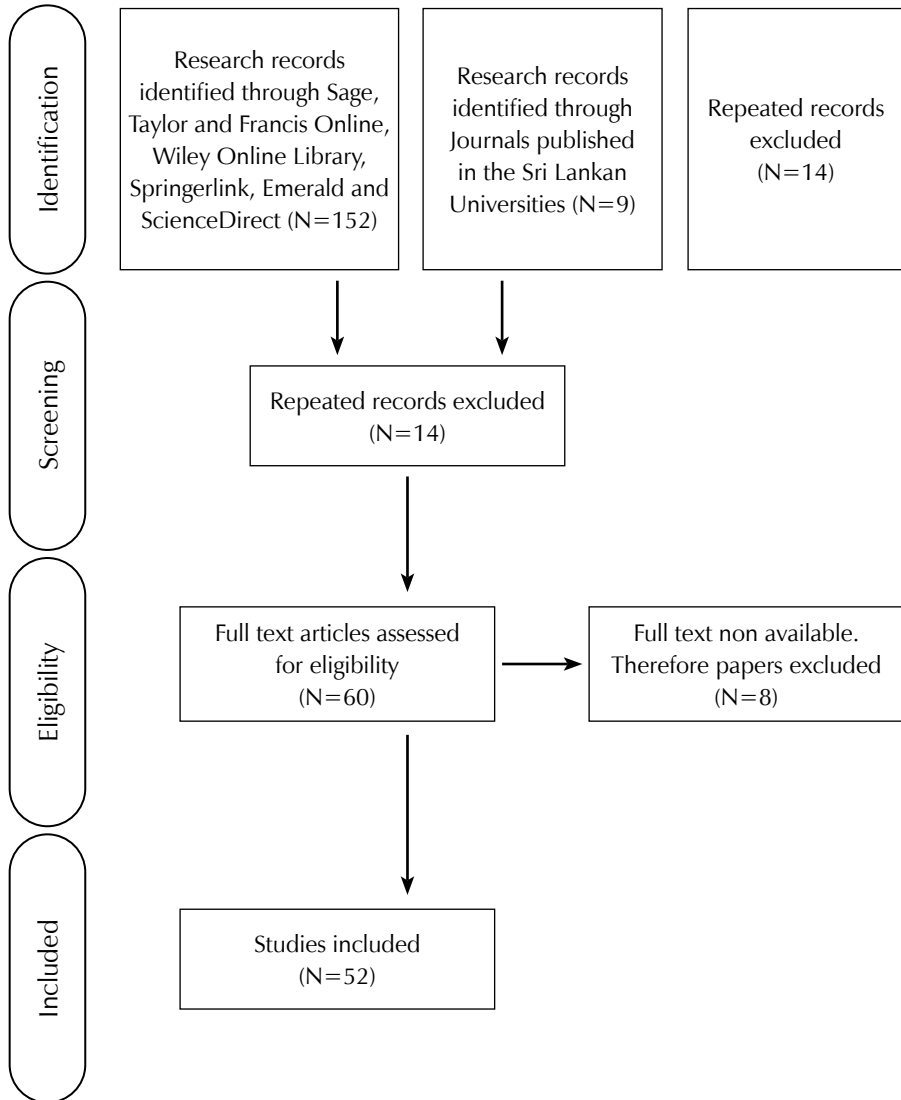
## Method

A clear literature review, considers (a) where the articles were discovered (i.e., databases), (b) when the search was implemented, (c) who undertook the search, (d) how the articles were found, (e) how many articles were identified and the final number of articles selected, and (f) why the articles were ultimately included/excluded needs (Wood et al. 2020; Dewasiri et al. 2018; Moher et al. 2009). According to Wood et al. (2020) a well-organized literature review can provide widespread and refreshing perspectives on topics. The databases such as Emerald, Taylor and Francis Online, Springerlink, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library and Sage were used when searching articles in order to collect the data. In the same way several books were studied in detail. Andrew and Sofian (2012); Guest (2014); Iddagoda et al. (2016) mentioned that Kahn is the first researcher who has written a scholarly work on employee engagement. Therefore, there is a range of published works from 1990 to 2020 for the desk research study. There is a common threat between the labels of employee engagement i.e. employee engagement, job engagement, work engagement and personal engagement. Those are the key words when searching the articles

and 161 article were generated. Only the articles in the English language were selected. During this endeavour 52 articles were selected in-order to achieve the aim of the study.

PRISMA model used for literature review is depicted under Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** PRISMA model for the study



Source: Adapted from Moher et al.,(2009).

## Labels of engagement

Various studies utilize a variety of terms to describe employee engagement. The term “work engagement” is used by researchers such as Aldrin and Merdiaty (2019); Tuckey et al. (2018); Petchsawang and McLean (2017); Mitonga-Monga and Hlongwane (2017); Knight et al. (2017); and Bakker and Demerouti (2008). Anaza and Rutherford (2012); Ro and Lee (2017); and Walden et al. (2017) all utilized the term “work engagement” in their studies. Meanwhile, Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) use the terms interchangeably in their research. According to Iddagoda et al. (2016), the employee engagement label is more appropriate since the term “employee” refers to a living person, a point supported by Kang and Sung in 2019 when they said that workers are critical stakeholders in an organization’s success and effectiveness. Without human capital, other resources such as financial capital are worthless. Additionally, Sendawula et al. (2018) and Kura et al. (2019) use the term “employee engagement”. To their credit, the researchers of this study prefer the term “employee engagement”.

## Employee engagement and work-related attitudes

Numerous work-related attitudes exist, including job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behaviour and organizational commitment (Iddagoda et al. 2015; Iddagoda et al. 2016; Opatha, 2012; Karia and Asaari, 2006; Wright, 2006; Alas, 2005). There is a case that employee engagement is not novel and that it is just old wine in a new bottle. Additionally, practitioners often describe employee engagement in emotional commitment, pleasure, and affiliation, conflating distinct notions by repackaging old wine (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Employee engagement has specific characteristics with these work-related attitudes. Iddagoda et al. (2016) and Saks (2006) highlight the distinction between employee engagement and work-related attitudes. According to Saks (2006), engagement is distinguished from many closely similar categories, including organizational citizenship behaviour, organizational commitment, job involvement and work involvement. According to Dharmasiri (2010), employee engagement encapsulates the essence of workers’ brain, hands, and heart involvement in their job. According to Dharmasiri, employee engagement is more closely linked to job involvement

and work involvement. Dunham (1984) notes that although involvement in work may be affected by a range of employment experiences over one's life, involvement in work and job at a given moment in time is not significantly influenced by the job held then. According to Iddagoda et al. (2016), employee engagement is a distinct phenomenon associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, job involvement, and work involvement. Additionally, they argue that although employee engagement is a novel notion, it is inextricably linked to the job and work involvement. Additionally, this research thinks that although employee engagement is a distinct concept, it has certain characteristics with other work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational citizenship behaviour, and organizational commitment.

### **Characteristics of an engaged employee**

Work organizations flourish when their workers are committed and emotionally invested in their jobs on a physical, cognitive, and emotional level is the view of Strom, et al. in 2014. Additionally, Richman (2006) believes that engaged workers are more loyal to their employers. According to Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017), employees with a high degree of employee engagement are enthusiastic and committed to high performance and self-improvement. An engaged employee is an organization's most valuable asset. According to Sharma and Nambudiri (2020), highly engaged workers are more likely to put effort into given activities, be creative and inventive in problem-solving, and demonstrate initiative and excitement on the job (2020). Additionally, Carbonara (2012) asserts that engaged workers are very creative. Work organizations thrive when they have employees who are loyal and attached physically, cognitively and emotionally to their work roles (Strom, et al. 2014). Also, in the view of Richman (2006) engaged employees are loyal to the organization. According to Van der Voet and Vermeeren (2017) employees who have high levels of employee engagement are energetic and focused on excellent performance and self-improvement. Engaged employee is the biggest asset of any organization.

According to AON (2018), engaged workers speak favourably about the company as they travel across society. AON (2018); Kang and Sung

(2019) emphasize the importance of engaged employees' retention. Smith and Langford (2011) discovered that engaged workers reported lower absenteeism. According to AON's (2018) report, they go above and above to accomplish corporate objectives. According to Robbins and Judge (2013); Menguc et al., 2013; Men 2015, engaged workers are motivated by their job and have a strong connection to their company. Bevan et al. (1997); Ologbo and Sofian (2013) defined an engaged employee as having the ability to operate in a team. Cook (2008) discovered that engaged workers are focused on the consumer. Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) note that the term "engagement" has daily implications of participation, emotion, excitement, and vitality. According to Graça et al. (2019), engaged workers have a more favourable perception of their working circumstances and a lower likelihood of sickness-related absence and turnover intention. Additionally, Graça et al. (2019) say that engaged workers encourage corporate citizenship and proactive behaviors, the latter of which is critical of contemporary companies defined by flexibility and rapid change as a result of globalization.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of engaged employee*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Author</b>
Say - When they interact with society, they speak favourably about the organization	AON (2018)
Stay – retention at a higher level	AON (2018); Kang and Sung (2019); Arefin et al. (2019); Graça et al. (2019)
Passion for work	Robbins and Judge (2013); Menguc et al. (2013); Men (2015); Sharma and Nambudiri (2020); Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017)
Energetic	Van der Voet&Vermeeren (2017)
Creative and innovative	Carbonara (2012); Sharma and Nambudiri (2020); Arefin et al. (2019)
Less absenteeism	Smith and Langford (2011); Graça et al. (2019)
Team player	Bevan et al. (1997); Ologbo and Sofian (2013)
Customer oriented	Cook (2008)
Loyal to the organization	Richman (2006); Salanova et al. (2005)
Proactive behaviours	Graça et al. (2019)
Self-improved	Van der Voet&Vermeeren (2017)

Source: own study.

## Definitions of employee engagement

While employee engagement is a frequently used word in human resource literature, it is not incorrect to say that it has many meanings (Chawla, 2019). The definition given by Rich et al. is the concurrent employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that enhance connections to work and people, personal present (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, complete performances (2010). This definition is based on Kahn's (1990) research. According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is defined as an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy directed toward work. Soane et al. (2012) established the reliability of three cognitive aspects of employee engagement defined by Rich et al. (2010).

Kahn (1990), according to Andrew and Sofian (2012), was the first researcher to publish an academic study on employee engagement. Kahn (1990) described employee engagement as the connection of organization members to their work roles; during role performances, individuals utilize and express themselves physically, intellectually, and emotionally. In their research, Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined engagement as a pleasant, satisfying state of mind associated with work that is marked by energy, commitment, and absorption. When Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined employee engagement, they emphasized three dimensions: energy, commitment, and absorption. Christian et al. (2011) defined employee engagement as "high degrees of personal involvement in the work activities done on the job" after evaluating various definitions. Dharmasiri (2010) states that employee engagement captures the essence of employees' head, hands and heart involvement in work. Researchers' view is that the definition of employee engagement presented by Dharmasiri (2010) has an influence of work involvement. There are two types of involvement i.e. job involvement and work involvement. Dunham (1984) states that job involvement is an attitude which is influenced heavily by one's current job situation. Job involvement is also influenced by previous work experiences (but to a lesser extent than work involvement). Dunham (1984) further states that work involvement refers to the involvement with or alienation from work in general.



Table 2. Employee engagement definitions

Author	Year	Definition	Comments
Kahn	1990	The process through which organization members' identities are connected to their work roles; during role performances, individuals use and express themselves physically, intellectually, and emotionally.	This definition defines engagement as a manifestation of being 'present at work'. It is critical to have a particular mental state in order to be 'present at work', since engagement requires a person to think, feel, and act on their job.
Maslach and Leiter	1998	An energizing condition of participation in personally satisfying activities that contribute to one's professional effectiveness perception.	Engagement of employees is a psychological condition. Employee engagement requires involvement.
Schaufeli, Salanova, Roma and Bakker	2002	Positive, satisfying state of mind associated with labour, marked by vitality, commitment, and absorption.	Employees that are engaged work diligently (vigour). Working diligently is more of a habit. By referring to employee engagement as a 'work-related state of mind', the authors mean that it is a mix of behavioural components and psychological state.
Harter, Schmidt and Hayes	2002	Employee engagement is a term that relates to an individual's participation, pleasure, and passion for work.	Employee engagement is a component of involvement. According to Dunham (1984), job/work engagement is a psychological variable. According to Harter et al. (2002), employee engagement is psychological in nature.

Cook	2008	Employee engagement is defined by workers' commitment to the company, belief in its values, and willingness to go above and beyond what is required of them in order to provide exceptional service to the client.	Influence with: 1. commitment 2. organizational citizenship behaviour.
Macey and Schneider	2008	Employee engagement is a desired state that has a purpose for the company and includes participation, dedication, passion, excitement, concentrated effort, and energy, implying that it combines both attitudinal and behavioural components.	Engagement is composed of both psychological and behavioural components.
Storey, Ulrich, Welbourne and Wright	2009	A collection of positive attitudes and actions that enable high-level work performance that is congruent with the organization's purpose	Engagement is composed of both psychological and behavioural components.
Shuck and Wollard	2010	The cognitive, emotional, and behavioural condition of an individual employee in relation to intended organizational objectives.	Engagement is composed of both psychological and behavioural components.
Rich, LePine, and Crawford	2010	The concurrent employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that foster connections to work and people, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, complete performances.	Engagement is composed of both attitudes and behavioural components.
Dharmasiri	2010	It [employee engagement] encapsulates the core of workers' participation in their job with their heads, hands, and hearts.	The definition of Dharmasiri bolsters Kahn's (1990) argument (2010).

Christian, Garza and Slaughter	2011	High levels of personal investment in the work tasks performed on a job.	Job performance is as a result of employee engagement.
Welch	2011	A dynamic, changing psychological condition that connects workers to their organizations, manifested physically, intellectually, and emotionally in organizational member role performances, and affected by organizational-level internal communication.	Employee engagement is a psychological state.
Soane, Truss, Alfes, Shantz, Rees and Gatenby	2012	The degree to which an individual is intellectually engrossed by his or her job.	Engage employee understand the importance of work rationally.
Aon Hewitt	2012	Employees are motivated to perform their best job when they are emotionally and intellectually engaged. Individual engagement is a psychological and behavioural condition.	The term "engagement" refers to a mix of psychological and behavioural factors.
Aon Hewitt	2013	Engagement is defined as the psychological and behavioural changes that occur as a result of increased employee performance.	Engagement is a result of both psychological and behavioural factors.
Robbins and Judge	2013	Engagement is defined as an individual's commitment to, happiness with, and passion for her job.	Performance of employees is a result. Influence with involvement.
Aon Hewitt	2015	Engagement is defined as an individual's commitment to, happiness with, and passion for her job.	Engagement is a psychological and behavioural construct. Performance of employees is a result.

Iddagoda, Opatha and Gunawardana	2016	Employee Engagement is the degree to which an employee becomes engaged in the work and the company intellectually, emotionally and behaviourally.	Employee engagement is a result of both behaviour and attitude. It is influenced by participation.
Eldor and Vigo-da-Gadot	2017	Employee engagement is a proactive, satisfying notion that represents the concurrent manifestation of many energies – physical, emotional, and cognitive – that benefit both companies and workers.	Employee engagement is a result of an employee's attitude and conduct.
Justin Walden, Eun Hwa Jung & Catherine Y. K. Westerman	2017	An immersing condition of work in which workers show excitement for accomplishing specific tasks while retaining a strong emotional connection to their professional function.	Employee engagement is an attitude.
Kabiru Maitama Kura, Faridahwati Moh. Sham-sudinb, Waheed Ali Umrani and Noor Maya Salleh	2019	Employee engagement is defined as workers' physical, cognitive, emotional, and intellectual dedication to their jobs.	Employee engagement encompasses both action and attitude. Employee engagement is inextricably linked to commitment.

Source: Adapted from Iddagoda et al. (2016).

According to Shen and Jiang (2019), although a number of public relations scholars accepted or updated Schaufeli's (2013) concept of a psychological state, their operationalization varied. Additionally, Shen and Jiang (2019) assert that Schaufeli's (2013) conceptualization did not correspond to his operationalization, which they define as a psychological state composed of behavioural, cognitive, and emotional components.

Saks (2006), Iddagoda et al., (2016), Dharmasiri (2010) believe that while employee engagement is a distinct concept, it does share some characteristics with other work-related attitudes, such as job involvement, work involvement, organizational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Employee engagement, according to Iddagoda et al. (2016); Dharmasiri (2010); and Macey and Schneider (2008), is a mix of attitude and conduct. According to the study, employee engagement is unusual in that it is a product of both attitude and behaviour. Individual engagement is defined as the Employee Engagement, is the extent to which an employee gets involved in the job and the organization cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally. This is the definition given by Iddagoda et al. in 2016 and serves as the working definition for this research.

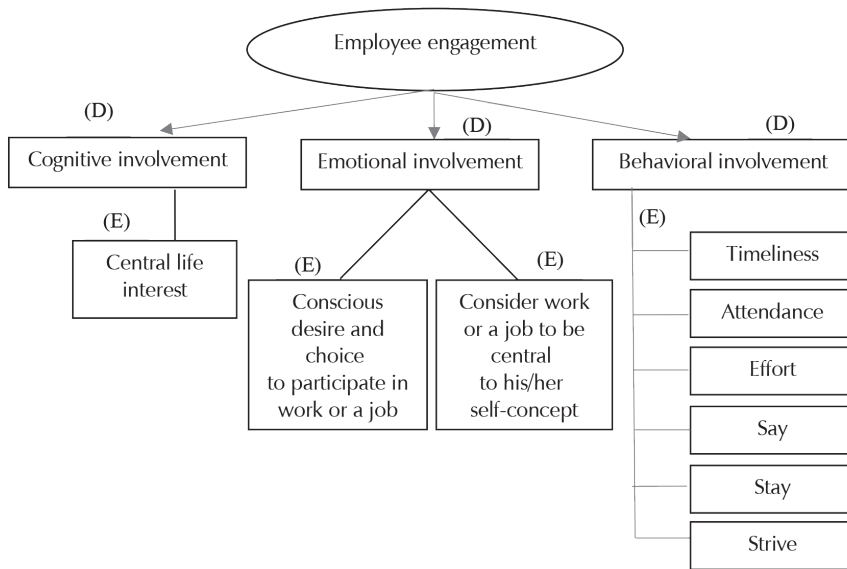
### **Validated and well adapted instruments to measure the construct of employee engagement**

Employee engagement tools were created by consulting companies such as Hay Group, Valtera Corporation, Price water house Coopers, Silk Road, and Gallup Organization (Witemeyer et al., 2013; Little and Little, 2006). There are many widely used academic tools for assessing employee engagement, including the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Witemeyer et al., 2013) and a Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA). According to Witemeyer et al. (2013), there is no standardized method for determining employee engagement. Little and Little (2006) found a misunderstanding of the terminology used in GWA. According to Little and Little (2006), the GWA is sometimes referred to as "The Survey Q12" or the "12 Gallup Questions", despite the fact that it is a 13-item scale.

According to Harter et al. (2002), the GWA was created to capture two significant types of employee survey questions. The first category is concerned with assessing psychological outcomes such as satisfaction, pride, loyalty,

customer service intent, and intention to remain with the business. The second category assesses or identifies problems under a manager's control that are antecedents to positive or negative attitude outcomes. According to Little and Little (2006), the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) comprises elements generated statistically. Furthermore, Little and Little (2006) claim that GWA discovered the statistical connections, in other words, the survey items, experimentally, not conceptually.

According to Schaufeli et al. (2002), employee involvement is classified into three subcategories. They are energy, commitment, and absorption. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) codified two UWES variants. Witemeyer et al. (2013) mention a seventeen-item and a nine-item version of each instrument, demonstrating their convergent validity and three-factor structure. Seppälä et al., (2009) also used confirmatory factor analysis to examine the UWES's factor structure and group and time invariant characteristics. Seppälä et al. (2009) used several samples from diverse occupational categories and included a longitudinal component in their research. According to Witemeyer et al. (2013), the Seppälä et al.'s (2009) research revealed that employee engagement might be regarded as a three- or one-dimensional construct. According to Witemeyer et al. (2013), no research showing the face or content validity of the UWES has been published to their knowledge. All of these data demonstrated a dearth of validated and well-adapted instruments for measuring employee engagement. Iddagoda et al. (2016) proposed a conceptually and operationally sound instrument. Consider Figure 2. Saunders et al. (2007) state that it is critical to consider the questionnaire's content validity (facial validity), construct validity, and criterion validity when assessing its validity.

**Figure 2:** Dimensions and elements of the construct of employee engagement

Source: Iddagoda et al. (2016).

## Gallup levels of employee engagement

Employees are engaged on three distinct levels, according to Gallup (2013), a consulting firm. They are divided into three categories: engaged, disengaged, and actively disengaged. According to Gallup (2013), actively disengaged workers are more hazardous than disengaged employees. This is because actively disengaged workers are not just disengaged, but also attempt to destroy whatever engaged people have accomplished. According to the study, there should be five distinct categories/levels of employee involvement, as listed below.

## Proposed engaged employees' levels

1. Actively/highly engaged: Goes above and beyond, frequently doing more than it is required from him/her. He/she is involved in the job

and the organization cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally in an extraordinary level. As he/she takes work as a central life interest, he/she tends to believe that the involvement in his/her work/job is the most important thing that happened to him/her. An actively/highly engaged person considers the foremost satisfaction in his/her life to be his/her work/job, believing that he/she live, eat and breathe with his/her work/job. Conscious desire and choice to participate in work or a job is in a high level. He/she speaks positively about the organization. Moreover, he/she is proud of the work he/she does, extremely loyal to the organization and is happy to stay at their organization a long period of time, passionately supporting the organizational vision mission and values.

2. Engaged: Those who belong to this category perform an “acceptable day’s work for an acceptable day’s pay” with the intention of staying with the organization. He/she also has the same cognitive and emotional involvement similar to those of the highly engaged employees, but less than highly engaged employee, more than the moderately engaged. Therefore, this category does not have any intension to leave the organization soon.
3. Moderately engaged: This category also performs an “acceptable day’s work for an acceptable day’s pay” but with no intention for any further attachments with the organization. They have a tendency of leaving the company.
4. Dis-engaged: He/she is intellectually, emotionally, and behaviourally disengaged from the work and organization. Additionally, absence is apparent from the outside of the company. He/she is averse to labour or employment and is unhappy with the work that he/she does.
5. Actively dis-engaged: The person with the highest dis-engagement level. He/she has a higher tendency for absenteeism and the intention of leaving the organization than the dis-engaged employees. This type of individual expresses his/her discontent towards the organization and job responsibilities to others. For example, he/she pass bad comments about the organization, discouraging the attempts of the engaged co-workers to reach organizational goals.



## Conclusion

Employee engagement is a specific term that encompasses both attitude and action. While employee engagement is unique, it is associated with work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction, participation, and dedication. Job participation and job involvement are the two work-related attitudes that are most closely linked to employee engagement. Employee engagement is classified into five categories: actively/highly engaged, engaged, moderately engaged, disengaged, and aggressively disengaged. One of the aims of this research is to provide a new insight on the levels of employee engagement. That is fulfilled through this study.

**Abstract:** Employee engagement is a human resource facet. Engaged employee is the dream of every Chief executive officer. The reason is the consequence of the employee engagement, namely employee job performance and organizational financial performance. Engaged employee is the instrument of organizational success. This study is to present levels of employee engagement. To present an insight on employee engagement through a thorough desk research is another aim of the study.

**Keywords:** Employee engagement, levels of employee engagement, work related attitudes, engaged employee characteristics

**Streszczenie:** Zaangażowanie pracowników to jeden z aspektów zasobów ludzkich. Zaangażowany pracownik jest marzeniem każdego prezesa. Powodem tego są następstwa zaangażowania pracowników w postaci wydajności ich pracy oraz wyników finansowych organizacji. Zaangażowany pracownik jest instrumentem sukcesu organizacyjnego. Niniejsze opracowanie ma na celu przedstawienie poziomów zaangażowania pracowników. Drugim celem badania jest uzyskanie wglądu w zaangażowanie pracowników przez dokładną analizę źródeł wtórnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zaangażowanie pracowników, poziomy zaangażowania pracowników, postawy związane z pracą, cechy zaangażowanego pracownika

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