CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Employee engagement in discussion: goals, perspectives and recommendations
Authors	Jeske, Debora;Sheehan, Maura;Linehan, Carol;Moran, Michael
Publication date	2017-01-01
Original Citation	Jeske, D., Sheehan, M., Linehan, C. and Moran, M. (2017) 'Employee engagement in discussion: goals, perspectives and recommendations', Journal of Human Resource Management, 20(2), pp. 21-29.
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://www.jhrm.eu/category/20172/
Rights	© 2017, the Authors. Journal of Human Resource Management is an open access journal which means that all content is freely available without charge to the user or his/her institution. Users are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without asking prior permission from the publisher or the author. Users can use, reuse and build upon the material published in the journal but only for non-commercial purposes. - http://www.jhrm.eu/publishing-agreement-copyright/
Download date	2026-09-06 06:28:22
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/5064

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Journal of HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

www.jhrm.eu • ISSN 2453-7683

Employee engagement in discussion: goals, perspectives and recommendations

Debora Jeske, Maura Sheehan, Carol Linehan, Michael Moran

ABSTRACT

This paper represents a summary of a debate on employee engagement that was conducted in a Business School setting. In this debate, representatives from key stakeholders group participated in this debate. The debate highlighted several critical concerns. These centered on the contextualization and employee-centered nature as well as the importance of clear goals and 'framing' of these activities. The consideration of multiple perspectives in combination with research and practice reports provides those interested in engagement with an overview of the matters that may emerge and need to be addressed prior to and following the implementation of any engagement initiatives.

KEY WORDS

employee engagement, stakeholders, situated learning, conflict

JEL Code: O15

1 INTRODUCTION

In the classroom or the board room, several questions are repeatedly debated: What is engagement and what does it mean to us as an organization? What purpose and end goals do engagement initiatives serve? We can address the previous questions by looking at the main points of debate when key stakeholders discuss employee engagement. In the following short article, we distil key issues around engagement from a half-day debate that took place in a Business School in September 2015 as part of a postgraduate degree course on Human Resource Management (HRM). A number of stakeholder participated in this debate. The debate was led by a panel of experts in HRM and aimed at future professionals seeking a career in this field. This included two academics in HRM and Union Studies based at Edinburgh Napier University. A professor in HRM also acted as the moderator. In addition, the panel was composed of two consultants, and three business representatives (working for companies) and one certifying body. The debate was attended by 48 postgraduate students in HRM and a number of subject-area specialists. The decision to opt for a debate rather than focus a group was preferred because the debate format would allow more attendees (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The debate was therefore selected as the most suitable approach in this case in order to share different approaches and perspectives that exist around engagement with a larger audience. In order to facilitate the debate, the second author of this paper had prepared a short handout that prioritized debate points, listing first the varying definitions of engagement employed in business, the level of analysis used to understand engagement, and finally the prospective influence of national culture. The paper focuses on the first two topics, as the last topic received less consideration in the debate due to the interest that the first two topics generated. The current paper originated from the notes, areas of confusion and (dis)agreement that were recorded by the first author during the debate. These were subsequently organized around major themes, taking an approach similar to thematic analysis advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006).

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Debora Jeske / University College Cork / Ireland / d.jeske@ucc.ie
Maura Sheehan / Edinburgh Napier University / UK / m.sheehan@napier.ac.uk
Carol Linehan / University College Cork / Ireland / carol.linehan@ucc.ie
Michael Moran / Dublin City University / Ireland / michael.moran44@mail.dcu.ie

1.1 FOCUS OF OUR DEBATE REFLECTIONS

Our main focus in this article is to outline differing stakeholder interpretations of engagement as awareness of these points may improve mutual understanding of others stakeholders' positions. The multi-stakeholder debate, summarized in this manuscript, will help practitioners in two ways. First, we provide a nuanced picture of engagement by blending a systematic overview of the literature on engagement with the differing interpretations stakeholders have of this concept. This may help practitioners in their own quest to identify what they aim to accomplish (with whom and with what purpose) in their own employee engagement strategies. Second, we hope that our reflections on points of contention and disagreement will enable practitioners to anticipate and select strategies to tackle potential conflict about the meaning, goals and purpose of such engagement activities. The next section introduces the term engagement.

Engagement has been at the forefront of HRM literature for the past fifteen years for several reasons. First, most professionals expect that engaged employees will provide a competitive advantage for employers in that they are more productive, offer better customer service and are less likely to leave their employer for other opportunities (Noe, 2013). Second, engagement has been found to be positively associated with innovation, talent retention, training, compensation, and development (see Anitha, 2013; Noe, 2013; Rana et al., 2014). However, while such evidence speaks for the positive benefits of engagement for the employer, our debate and the literature suggests that engagement is not as easily defined – for two reasons.

Defining engagement is the first hurdle (see Garton & Mankins, 2015; Macey & Schneider, 2008). One of the debate participants proposed that "engagement is 'socially constructed' through the use of language, action and mutual understanding". We can further illustrate the trickiness of defining engagement by considering several definitions of engagement. For example, engagement has been defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, pg. 74). An alternative definition is provided by Robbins, Judge, and Campbell (2010, pg. 64) who defined employee engagement as "an individual's involvement with, satisfaction with, and enthusiasm for, the work they do." A final definition of employee engagement considers employees engaged when these are fully involved in their work and are both committed to their jobs and organizations (Vance, 2006), demonstrating "a genuine willingness to contribute to organizational success" (Albrecht, 2010, pg. 5).

These definitions demonstrate that engagement may be defined in different but related ways, which is why engagement is usually considered a multidimensional construct (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010). For example, authors have suggested that engagement encompasses several dimensions - including trait engagement, psychological state engagement, and behavioral engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). That is, engagement may reflect employee personality and manifested as employee immersion and involvement. Or it may be positioned as behavior and captured in employee discretionary efforts (e.g., which may be exhibited in the form of extra-role behaviors, personal initiative, or self-initiated role expansion).

Engagement operates and emerges at several levels – the individual, the job, and the organization. At the micro-level, personal engagement reflects the extent to which an employee can express their 'preferred or personal self' (Kahn, 1990, pg. 700), which Truss et al. (2013, pg. 2659) also refers to the 'authentic expression of self'. Thus the engagement of an employee may be subject to the extent that the employee can express their own self freely in the work setting (Kahn, 1990). At the next level, employee engagement is thought to reflect employee involvement and satisfaction with their job, specifically the work they complete (see Harter et al., 2002). Thus, the term employee engagement also captures engagement with the job, so engagement is not only seen as a function of the employee's experience but also seen in relation to the job that the individual holds. And finally, at the organizational level engagement can also be construed in relation to an employee's involvement in organizational affairs and priorities. The contribution of engaged workers at work is that they not only act within their role but while doing so, go beyond contractual obligations (i.e., extra-role). That is, they are emotionally engaged with those around them and the organization itself, rather than just doing the minimum that is contractually required of them. These notions may, however, be very much dependent on the job/organizational characteristics. For example, authentic expression of the self is unlikely to be supported in military or similarly hierarchical settings where the organization expects significant affective commitment but does not necessarily encourage employee voice and self-expression.

While often identified by organizations as 'desirable' and a 'key to performance', employee engagement is therefore a concept that generates challenges due to the different ways in which it is defined and the ambiguities around what exactly employees are engaging with e.g. task absorption or affective organizational commitment. Therefore, it is often unclear as to whether employee engagement initiatives should be primarily aimed at increasing individual, team or organizational performance outcomes. These circumstances generate a number of areas for misunderstandings and disagreements. In the next section, we focus on two potential tensions in terms of what key stakeholders wish to achieve via employee engagement initiatives. The points of contention emerged during our debate and focus primarily on the possible orientation and focus of engagement activities versus the different (and potentially incompatible) goals that stakeholders feel such activities would serve.

2 POINTS OF CONTENTION

In the following sections, we outline some of the key points that were raised in our debate exercise by the various stakeholders (union representatives, business leaders, HR managers, students and faculty members). The first section explores where stakeholders placed responsibility for engagement and its outcomes, i.e. with the organization as a whole or employees themselves. The second segment discusses the differing interpretations of the orientation and goals of engagement activities.

2.1 DECIDING WHO IS (JOINTLY) RESPONSIBLE FOR ENGAGEMENT

During the debate, it became apparent that responsibility for employee engagement was attributed to a variety of stakeholders. Perspectives included situating engagement as solely subject to the individual employee; or as due to good line management and support; or to the organizational characteristics overall. Participants were also likely to differentiate between activities that were primarily employee-centered compared to initiatives that were more contextualized (e.g., activities that also considered the larger team and organizational context within which employees performed their job). Not surprisingly, different performance expectations would arise depending on which actor or entity was expected to bear the most responsibility for engagement at work.

The separation of engagement into personal, job, and organizational dimensions has several implications for what relevant stakeholders expect to gain from engagement activities. Indeed, we noted that many debate members discussed engagement as functional and employee-driven, with less mention made of the industrial or organizational context that may facilitate or detract from engagement. Many stakeholders assumed that engagement can be "fixed" at the level of the employee, rather than the team or organizational level. This is only partially accurate as an employee does not operate in a vacuum, without colleagues or an organizational framework that determines which resources and demands are placed on them. In support of this, research shows that job resources can influence personal and work engagement and vice versa (Llorens et al., 2007). When no incentive exists (e.g., long-term commitment to the job or employee), it is unlikely that greater engagement will emerge. Much of the engagement research concentrates on the 'job resources' of supervisor support and colleague support (Brough et al., 2013).

Engagement is now seen as an integral part of HRM (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013) and features in the debate around 'high performance work systems' and employee performance (Macduffie, 1995). More and more research and practitioner-oriented work has focused on linking engagement to organizational performance (e.g., Anitha, 2013; CIPD, 2011). When responsibility for engagement is predominantly placed on employees, it is easy to understand why some initiatives fail to generate the results management seeks to achieve. The relationship between increasing engagement and performance is likely to be mediated by a large number of additional variables. This is also known as the "black box" issue in HRM, where the relationship between HRM practices (inputs) and performance (outputs) is often subject to a number of unknown third variables (e.g., Gardner et al., 2001). Similar effects are likely to play a role in engagement initiatives as well (see work by Jiang et al., 2012, 2013). Other relevant "black box" variables (particularly in the case of employee-centered initiatives) include the effectiveness of the activity in terms of how it is implemented, the support this intervention has among employees and supervisors alike, but also the extent to which the jobs feature autonomy and room for employees to maybe change and amend their work in ways that increases their engagement with the job. The lack of recognition of these variables is likely to shape the extent to which engagement initiatives can or are even able to affect certain performance outcomes in the first instance.

While resources at work can build engagement, demands or constraints in the work environment may detract from it. For example, if the individual is forced to act in a manner that does not allow for an authentic expression of self (Truss et al., 2013), they may experience the work environment as more stressful. This is one of the reasons why engagement has been discussed in relation to burnout at work (see Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Leiter & Stright, 2009). If employees are less satisfied with organizational communication, lower engagement is likely to coincide (Iyer & Israel, 2012). Lower employee engagement has also been linked to both lower organizational commitment and higher turnover intention (also called withdrawal cognition in Iyer & Israel, 2012). Indeed, less engagement is often linked with poorer individual well-being but also lower performance and citizenship behavior (Christian et al., 2011; Hakanen & Schaufeli 2012; Soane, 2014). Disengaged employees may also participate in fewer activities (e.g., training, meetings) and be more likely to disengage entirely (e.g., in terms of high turnover rates, absenteeism). This means that teams featuring disengaged employees may also report less mutual commitment and team relations, which may further reduce overall team performance. By creating employee-centric initiatives that disregard the wider work context, such activities are likely set to fail. As a result, in the preparation of engagement initiatives, those responsible for their development and implementation have to first understand which factors already exist (including resources such as work tools and organizational communication platforms, see Iyer & Israel, 2012), may need to be added or addressed to ensure these activities will succeed in raising engagement at a personal, job or organizational level.

The variables which will be considered key in the preparation of the engagement initiatives may depend on whether the goal is to raise engagement of the individual employees in relation to their job, their team or the organization overall. In the next section, we continue with this theme on clearly framing such activities.

2.2 CLARIFYING GOALS OF ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

What are the expected outcomes and goals of engagement activities? The feedback from our participants in our debate suggested that employers are likely to seek the positive benefits of work and organizational engagement such as higher productivity. For example, engaged employees are expected to make a difference and have a real impact on outcomes valued by the organization (Garton & Mankins, 2015). This focus also narrows their view of the organization as the provider of such projects – but may not necessarily lead them to recognize the organization as a constraining contextual factor. Many union representatives may be wary to support any initiatives that seem to push employees towards more discretionary effort or when the benefit for the employees or anything but the 'bottom line' is not apparent to the union (see also MacLeod & Clarke, 2009).

Our debate further suggested that our participants had been part of engagement activities that focused on achieving, often widely divergent, goals. For example, they were, predominantly, focused on employees' personal engagement (e.g., people-oriented). Others, however, were aimed to support and develop organizational engagement in pursuit of a specific performance goal instead. This categorization as either one or the other is unfortunate. Previous work suggests that HR practices are often classified as "people initiatives" of potentially of minimal economic value to the organization, rather than activities that are compatible with business objectives (see Evans & Novicevic, 2010). Regrettably, many well-intentioned HR-led engagement projects may be perceived similarly – as "people initiatives" without business benefits. This situation may then give rise to fundamental disagreements between stakeholders involved in the design (such as HR managers), delivery (such as manager), and recipients (such as employees) regarding the value to those organizing and those participating these projects.

The key message from this part of the debate is this: Practitioners and HR managers need to review how engagement initiatives are framed. This is highlighted by the conclusion of one of the panel members who also represented a professional body: "The debate is continuing to rage; what it actually is, how you apply it and how and what to measure". Success is more likely when all key stakeholders agree on and clearly identify what kind of expectations are connected to running such projects, as they may be expected to meet (possibly diverse) objectives. As soon as it is clear which employee and business values will be addressed by these initiatives, it will also be easier for practitioners and those running these projects to develop performance expectations (or to at least outline a business or people-related rationale to combine people-oriented and business interests). Based on our debate and the literature, we outline three approaches that can be utilized to help ensure engagement activities will be implemented to so that multiple goals and purposes can be achieved.

The first option for implementers of engagement projects is to frame these as a means to enhance greater organizational performance. However, this creates an outcome measure that is a distant rather than proximal (close) performance outcome for employees. Framing activities in this manner may not be particularly motivating for employees to whom the burden of 'more engagement' would fall. Linking engagement and organizational performance directly may potentially overlook the role of workplace conditions that operate as barriers and hurdles to performance on a broader scale, such as existing resources and skill level of employees. Research and practitioner reports have identified many antecedents and predictors of engagement (e.g., Anitha, 2013; CIPD, 2011; Garton & Mankins, 2015; Sarti, 2014). Which factors may be particularly relevant are dependent on the kind of engagement activity that is run (e.g., goals, purpose, and assessment form). Several of the factors also appear particularly relevant to personal engagement, including employee involvement, authenticity of managers, and good person-job fit (CIPD, 2011). When job or work engagement is the focus, it may be worthwhile to not just consider predictors of personal engagement itself but also those that shape interactions with others. Thus, it may be particularly relevant to consider the extent to which employees have supportive work environments (Rana et al., 2014).

A second option to frame an engagement activity is to point to the organizational investments in its workforce. Unfortunately, such attempts may be perceived as manipulative in that they try to make the employee feel indebted to the organization or morally obliged to participate. Heyman and Ariely (2004) furthermore noted that when individuals receive no or only low payment in monetary exchanges their performance decreases. While this research was conducted with students, employment situations, in which employees are asked to deliver more for little or no financial benefit, are unlikely to generate higher performance outcomes. Heyman and Ariely (2004, pg. 792) thus propose that "money itself can be a cue to the type of exchange that individuals consider themselves to be in, which in term influences their propensity to exert effort."

If an engagement project is described as merely financially driven employees may not be as intrinsically motivated as in the case of initiatives that are conceived of as being mutually beneficial to employees and the organization. This was a point particularly raised by the union representative at the debate: engagement needs to be reciprocal and requires trust, justice and employee voice. In contrast, a HR practitioner at the debate argued that the focus of engagement is to support strategic business objectives. This means that communication around the benefits of certain HR practices for employees can create a conundrum. On the one hand, it may serve to fulfill certain employee expectations that are part of the psychological contract – especially when the HR practice is based on

notions of social exchange and mutual benefit (e.g., development and support). On the other hand, employees may feel unduly pressured when the perceived objective of such practices is to foster financial performance of the organization. This is a distant goal that emphasizes the market-driven nature of the exchange relationship, which may highlight the fact that employees are not financially gaining themselves when extending additional discretionary efforts. In addition to creating untrustworthy engagement feedback or reducing voice, such an initiative may undermine trust in management (see also Dundon & Gollan, 2007) and any discretionary effort that is not linked to financial performance.

Good leadership is a central element in engagement, as it not only has a direct and positive effect on trust, but can also indirectly affect behavioral engagement via the creation of trust (e.g., Kahn, 1990). Managerial leadership may also play a key role in terms of how such activities are interpreted – an investment or bribe. For example, the importance of the managers being engaging and practicing a more participative management style (e.g., by supporting employee participation in decisions, helping them to achieve their goals) to foster engagement was observed by Sarti (2014). Exhibiting behavioral integrity in line with the core values and good leadership skills was emphasized by MacLeod and Clarke (2009).

The third option is to frame the engagement activities around the personal benefits to be gained if employees participate. The literature suggests that both economic and socioemotional resources will increase the amount of personal (cognitive, emotional and physical) resources an employee will be willing to devote to their work (Saks, 2006). If the engagement also feeds into some form of training assessment or skill profile analysis, the individual employee may be more open to participating (see work by Anitha, 2013; Garton & Mankins, 2015). If efforts to maintain and increase employee engagement are complemented with career progression options, such as mentoring or coaching (a form of support in exchange for greater engagement, see Saks, 2006), turnover might be lowered, and the reputation of the company may also be enhanced.

We would like the reader to consider one more aspect that may outline the difficulties that practitioners may encounter when they want to initiate an engagement activity. One of the debate participants in an HR role argued that organizations can tackle engagement from different angles: One is to build emotional engagement (satisfaction and liking), another is to build rational engagement (which may involve fostering value and mission driven understanding), while the third option is to build motivational engagement (in the hope it leads to more discretionary effort). Each of these angles may serve different objectives. Whatever goal is adopted, it is very likely that the purpose of a workplace initiative often captures power dynamics and is likely to mirror the interests of those who have or want to gain more influence in the workplace. Any engagement survey is likely to be an expression of power dynamics between stakeholders. That is, power can operate on different levels. In the workplace, power dynamics may influence the in differential use and access of resources, result in the participation in or the exclusion from decision-making, help clarify meaning and support empowerment, but also emergence the use of disciplinary power (see overview on power and empowerment in Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). For the sake of brevity, we draw some general suggestions on how power is linked to engagement.

At a very basic level, engagement initiatives are influenced by various motives. This might also concern the implementation, participation in, and use of feedback from evaluations as they become instruments of and expressions of existing power brokers. Wilkinson et al. (2004) reported that managers still exercise a significant amount of control over the degree to which employees have a voice – although several organizational representatives in their study believed in a direct relationship between voice and performance. We would argue that this link is again subject to many "black box" variables, very much like the link between greater engagement and performance. This highlights yet again that the conceptualization of employee engagement may differ: Engagement as one focused on task completion, or engagement at a political and social level, in line with empowerment and voice. In addition, engagement at work is often limited by the control mechanisms or resource restrictions in place – these restrictions may not be given due consideration in engagement initiatives. As outlined above, they may merely function as a means to control opinion (suppress voice or indirectly reduce employee voice, also a concern raised by union representatives, see MacLeod & Clarke, 2009). In this case, employees are constrained in terms of what they experience, what they are exposed to in terms of information – all ways that may limit their ability to resist management action. Information may further be used to discipline rather than develop employees and punish non-compliance.

We summarized the points of contention and aspects often in need of clarification in Table 1. These may, in addition to the following recommendation section, support the development and success of future engagement initiatives.

Table 1: Main points to consider when running engagement initiatives

Points of contention	Points needing clarification
Understanding and definition of engagement	Transparent, measurable and mutual understanding of performance (e.g., nature and change expected)
Dimension of engagement (and level: individual, team, or organizational)	Goal agreement and purpose at appropriate levels regarding the framing and motives behind initiatives
Responsibility for supporting, running and evaluating engagement initiatives	Potential benefits (e.g., benefit of increase, types of increase)
Presence of resources (and level, as above) to support engagement – might also extend to management	Role of leadership support
	Critical evaluation and consideration of who is involved (e.g., power dynamics and stakeholders)

Source: own research

3 RECOMMENDATION FOR HR PRACTITIONERS AND MANAGERS

The discussion around the issues that arise in terms of the focus, purpose, clarity and assessment of engagement initiatives resulted in several insights. Some of these are based on our experience of how the debate supported, clarified, but also highlighted the different perspectives that some stakeholders may have on engagement. As a result, we would like to outline a number of learning points and recommendations for practitioners and managers who are tasked with raising engagement levels.

First, it is recommended that HR practitioners and managers critically reflect upon what level and kind of engagement is being sought within their specific context and at what levels (e.g., employee, job, team and/or organizational). Gaining clarity about what is the main goal is essential when deciding how to achieve engagement via support or campaign mechanisms (e.g., engagement campaigns aimed at increasing personal or work/job engagement are unlikely to succeed if they are not aimed at individuals and considerate of their work relationships). As we outlined in the introduction, engagement may differ in terms of its antecedents and determinants depending on whether or not initiatives are aimed at personal, job and work, or organizational engagement (the type of engagement, see Saks, 2006). Employees may be more likely to show greater engagement when they have received the resources and benefits that support such engagement or warrant some degree of reciprocity via engagement (Saks, 2006). This more tangential relationship with the organization may discourage personal engagement, yet allow the temporary workers to 'uncouple' themselves from their role (Truss et al., 2013, pg. 2659).

Second, engagement initiatives can be a means to explore the process of learning of role-specifics, team dynamics and organizational dynamics. We recommend that the kind of activities facilitate learning at employee, team and organizational level are carefully evaluated. Situated learning is likely to be critical for such evaluations (see Hotho et al., 2014). In this case, learning may occur in a more informal setting and be the result of everyday interaction. By observing the role of these relationships and the role of pro-social norms, team climate and organizational culture, HR managers and trainers may also be able to identify which particular elements are fostering engagement and at what level (e.g., the individual or the team). The process of situated learning may also be compatible with the notions of interaction-interdependence and schema diversity as means to understand how tension can facilitate organizational learning (see Antonacopolou & Chiva, 2007). These authors use the term 'schema' which denotes structures that reflect the social systems and enable actors to anticipate and learn how to engage with certain situations. These schemas are created by the actors in interaction with others and shape how agents' view each other (which may therefore also be influenced by historical animosity and different goals, e.g., trade unions and businesses). Interaction-interdependence recognizes that social systems – such as organizations – include numerous heterogeneous agents [stakeholders] that are interdependent. Only through interactions can heterogeneity of both actions and schemas and reach a degree of conformity (or agreement) be addressed.

A third recommendation stems from our own experience with engaging stakeholders in debates. The current article was the result of a debate held in a Business School setting in partnership with businesses and various

representatives from various sectors, union representatives, and instructors. The insight we gained may also be replicated in a similar fashion by employers who seek out Business School contacts. Strategic partnerships between educational partners and businesses may help to at least minimize conflicts about and inform workplace initiatives. For example, debates such as these may allow business partners to learn about counterintuitive or novel viewpoints (see also Paton et al., 2013). This exchange may therefore enable business stakeholders to gain insight into complexities behind the ineffectiveness of certain practices. In particular, participation in debates with other external stakeholders will contribute to stakeholders' knowledge about inherently held, but potentially not explicitly discussed, assumptions about the benefits and goals of workplace initiatives. Such debates can therefore bring to light the potential conflicts that may arise between stakeholders when new activities are conceptualized or initiated in organizations. Only through this conflict may stakeholders become aware of their values regarding the pragmatic, moral or overall legitimacy of certain projects (see discussion about managerial perceptions of HR practice in Evans & Novicevic, 2010).

And finally, such debate participation will enable all stakeholders to engage in conflict-driven learning (situated learning) and knowledge exchanges on neutral ground (e.g., in a Business School). The participation of the different stakeholders will pave the way to improved understanding and effective learning from conflict or critical incidents. Evidence suggests that cooperative conflict management styles can play a positive role in shaping employee voice behaviors (see Erkutlu & Chafra, 2015). By teaching staff communication skills that emphasize cooperative conflict management, stakeholders are enabled to identify mutually beneficial gains of engagement initiatives (rather than the 'financial bottom line' alone). This will be particularly helpful when trying to gain the commitment of employees, employee representatives, and managers tasked with carrying out engagement-oriented activities. In addition, teaching such skills and working towards complimentary and cooperative solutions will help the different actors to recognize the potential roles and responsibilities for managing and running future initiatives that may face resistance. Such approaches may also be combined with the development of organizational authorship, or the degree to which individuals take responsibility for their contributions to achieving the goals of the organization to which they belong (Gorli et al., 2015). Simultaneously, the concept of organizational authorship assumes that stakeholders take responsibility for their part in decision-making and contributions. This then may foster a more cooperative rather than competitive and defensive discourse when stakeholders meet to discuss workplace activities. As "willingness to contribute to organizational success" is part of the definition of engagement (Albrecht, 2010, pg. 5), the concept of organizational authorship may support a more inclusive and effective discussion of the different priorities in the development of initiatives aimed at increasing organizational engagement. Gorli et al. (2015, pg. 1360) developed a potentially useful tool called the 'Actionability Chart' that enables practitioners to map out individual and collective demands as well as the technical, structural and procedural elements involved.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of our paper was to highlight that while employee engagement is a popular and contemporary issue for academics and practitioners, key stakeholders diverge in their perspective on where they situate responsibility for engagement, how they design initiatives, and what the key drivers and expected outcomes are.

More often than the not, the debate focuses on increasing engagement. The debate about less engagement and the performance implications are largely negative in connotation, although the outcomes of engagement may depend on the type of engagement that is targeted (Saks, 2006). However, even acknowledging that, some circumstances may foster disengagement but may not always or immediately results in significant reductions in performance. For the sake of brevity, we make just one short observation here. Yes, disengaged employees may show less personal engagement with the job and the responsibilities. That is, their behavior and engagement levels suggest they inhabit a role within the workplace without fully embracing this role. That said, detachment from one's role or workplace may, in some temporary circumstances, enable some employees to cope more easily with roles and tasks when these allow not for self-expression or best utilization of their skills (which would potentially foster more engagement). It may also be a potential means to counter-balance the demands due to work intensification (see discussion around the problematics that arise from high engagement and insufficient reward strategies in George, 2011).

In some instances, too much engagement may also fail to achieve objectives and lead to exhaustion and over-commitment. In other words, some detachment may be functional – and thus disengagement may not always be automatically negative for performance. For example, many temporary, part-time workers may be harder to engage as their jobs may not give them the opportunity to express themselves or the job choices were limited. Further research would allow practitioners to identify when disengagement is functional and not detrimental to performance compared to dysfunctional disengagement levels that also results in poorer performance.

A second and related point regards the role of fit in the discussion around engagement (CIPD, 2011; Rothman & Welsh, 2013). In order to achieve engagement at the micro- to macro-level, employers should review how

effectively they have selected, trained and placed their employees to ensure good job-person or job-organization fit. However, like functional, undesirable or dysfunctional engagement, defining (mis)fit and the extent to which this might have negative compared to desirable consequences for the organization may be difficult to differentiate. The role of good person-job fit as a precursor to engagement has been emphasized in previous work (CIPD, 2011). For example, poor person-job fit has may lead to more dysfunctional engagement leading to burnout and loss in productivity. However, there is no guarantee that good person-job fit will avoid a similar outcome if the organizational changes but resources and demands are not adjusted. Instead of focusing on engagement, it may often be necessary to assess whether or not the basic building blocks for engagement to emerge are actually in place (e.g., if demands on employees and in the job are met by the right resources; see also Rothman & Welsh, 2013). Potential starting points include reviewing and potentially eliminating organizational practices that can undermine engagement such as insufficient upskilling and training, overtime working and pressures, poor work-life balance and presenteeism at work (see also CIPD, 2011).

We conclude with possible questions for further deliberation and future research. First, do we need to change our questions from "How can we engage our employees?" to "How we can make work and our organizations more engaging?" Furthermore, given that the importance of linking of HR and performance reflects the need to enhance organizational outputs (such as productivity and financial performance), more careful attention needs to be given to key mediating constructs such as engagement, commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors (HR 'inputs') - and how HR policies influence such mediators (Jiang et al., 2012). Indeed, if engagement carries little weight, we may need to re-evaluate the importance given to engagement.

In conclusion, it is essential for organizations clarify how they define engagement, in their contexts and at relevant levels and what they seek to achieve by enhancing employee engagement. The value that engagement contributes to organizational performance outcomes must also be carefully evaluated. However, despite differences in individual perspectives between academics and practitioners, employee engagement is not a matter of supervisory responsibility alone but only comes about as a result of careful resource management and mutual knowledge sharing and learning.

REFERENCES

Albrecht, S. (2010). *Handbook of Employee Engagement*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

Anitha, J. (2013). Determinants of employee engagement and their impact on employee performance. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 63, 308-323.

Antonacopoulou, E., & Chiva, R. (2007). The social complexity of organizational learning. *Management Learning*, *38*, 277-295.

Arrowsmith, J., & Parker, J. (2013). The meaning of 'employee engagement' for the values and roles of the HRM function. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*, 2692-2712.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3,* 77-101

Brough, P., Timms, C., Siu, O.-I., Kalliath, T., O'Driscoll, M. P., Sit, C. H., Lo, D., & Lu, C.-Q. (2013). Validation of the Job Demands-Resources model in cross-national samples: Cross-sectional and longitudinal predictions of psychological strain and work engagement. *Human Relations*, *66*, 1311-1335.

Christian, M. S., Garza, A. S., & Slaughter, J. E. (2011). Work engagement: A quantitative review and test of its relations with task and contextual performance. *Personnel Psychology*, *64*, 89-136.

CIPD (2011). Engagement for sustainable organisation performance. Shaping the Future. available at: http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/practical-tools/engagement-for-sustainable-organisation-performance.aspx (accessed 10 July 2016).

Dundon, T., & Gollan, P. (2007). Re-conceptualising non-union voice. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *18*, 1182-1198

Erkutlu, H., & Chafra, J. (2015). The mediating roles of psychological safety and employee voice on the relationship between conflict management styles and organizational identification. *American Journal of Business*, *30*, 72-91.

Evans, W. R., & Novicevic, M. M. (2010). Legitimacy of HRM practices: Managerial perceptions of economic and normative value. *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, *15*, 13-27.

Gardner, T. M., Moynihan, L. M., Park, H. J., & Wright, P. M. (2001). Beginning to unlock the black box in the HR firm performance relationship: The impact of HR practices on employee attitudes and employee outcomes. *CAHRS Work-*

ing Paper #01-12. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies. Available at: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cahrswp/75 (accessed 31 October 2016).

Garton, E. & Mankins, M. C. (2015). Engaging your employees is good, but don't stop there. 3 December, Harvard Business Review, available at: https://hbr.org/2015/12/engaging-your-employees-is-good-but-dont-stop-there?utm_campaign=HBR&utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social (accessed 12 October 2016).

George, J. M. (2011). The wider context, costs, and benefits of work engagement. *European Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology*, *20*, 53–59.

Gorli, M., Nicolini, D., & Scaratti, G. (2015). Reflexivity in practice: Tools and conditions for developing organizational authorship. *Human Relations*, *68*, 1347-1375.

Hakanen, J. J., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2012). Do burnout and work engagement predict depressive symptoms and life satisfaction? A three-wave seven-year prospective study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *141*, 415-424.

Hardy, C., & Leiba-O'Sullivan, S. (1998). The power behind empowerment: Implications for research and practice. *Human Relations*, *51*, 451-483.

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*, 268–279.

Heyman, J., & Ariely, D. (2004). Effort for payment: A tale of two markets. *Psychological Science*, *15*, 787-793.

Hotho, J. J., Saka-Helmhout, A., & Becker-Ritterspach, F. (2014). Bringing context and structure back into situated learning. *Management Learning*, *45*, 57-80.

Iyer, S., & Israel, D. (2012). Structural Equation Modeling for testing the impact of organization communication satisfaction on employee engagement. *South Asian Journal of Management*, *19*, 51-81.

Jiang, K., Lepak, D., Hu, J. and Baer, J. (2012). How does human resource management influence organizational outcomes? A meta-analytic investigation of mediating mechanisms. *Academy of Management Journal*, *55*, 1264-1294.

Jiang, K., Takeuchi, R., & Lepak, D. (2013). Where do we go from here? New perspectives on the black boxes on strategic human resource management research. *Journal of Management Studies*, *50*, 1448-1480.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *33*, 692-724.

Krueger, R. & Casey, M. (2000). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication

Leiter, M. P., & Stright, N. (2009). The social context of work life: Implications for burnout and work engagement, in C.L. Cooper, J. C. Quick, & M. J. Schabraq (Eds), *International Handbook of Work and Health Psychology*, 3rd. ed., John Wiley & Sons London, pp. 25-48.

Llorens, S., Schaufeli, W., Bakker, A., & Salanova, M. (2007). Does a positive gain spiral of resources, efficacy beliefs, and engagement exist? *Computers in Human Behavior*, *23*, 825-841.

Macduffie, J. P. (1995). Human-Resource bundles and manufacturing performance - organizational logic and flexible production systems in the world auto industry. *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, *48*, 197-221.

Macey, W. H., & Schneider, B. (2008). The meaning of employee engagement. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *1*, 3-30.

MacLeod, D., & Clarke, N. (2009). Engaging for success: Enhancing performance through employee engagement. A report to Government. Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, Kew, Richmond, Surrey. Available at: http://engageforsuccess.org/engaging-for-success (accessed 12 October 2016).

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). *The Truth about Burnout: How Organisations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do about it*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

Noe, R. A. (2013). *Employee Training and Development*. 6th ed., McGraw-Hill, New York.

Paton, S., Chia, R., & Burt, G. (2013). Relevance or 'relevate'? How university business schools can add value through reflexively learning from strategic partnerships with business. *Management Learning*, *45*, 267-288.

Rana, S., Archichvili, A., & Tkachenko, O. (2014). A theoretical model of the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, *26*, 249-266.

Rich, B. L., Lepine, J. A., & Crawford, E. R. (2010). Job Engagement: Antecedents and Effects on Job Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, *53*, 617-635.

Robbins, S. P., Judge, T. A., & Campbell, T. T. (2010). *Organizational Behaviour.* Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, Essex.

Rothman S., & Welsh, C. (2013). Employee engagement: The role of psychological conditions. *Management Dynamics*, *22*, 14-25.

Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *21*, 600-619.

Sarti, D. (2014). Leadership styles to engage employees: evidence from human service organizations in Italy. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, *26*, 202-216.

Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 3*, 71-92.

Soane, E. (2014). Leadership and employee engagement, in C. Truss, R. Delbridge, K. Alfes, A. Shantz & E. Soane (Eds), *Employee Engagement in Theory and Practice* (pp. 149-162). Routledge, London and New York.

Truss, C., Shantz, A., Soane, E., Alfes, K., & Rick Delbridge, R. (2013). Employee engagement, organisational performance and individual well-being: Exploring the evidence, developing the theory. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*, 2657–2669.

Vance, R. (2006). *Employee Engagement and Commitment*. Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation, Alexandria, VA.

Wilkinson, A., Dundan, T., Marchington, M., & Ackers, P. (2004). Changing patterns of employee voice: Case studies from the UK and the Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, *46,* 298-322.