

To engage or not? Antecedents of employee engagement in Sri Lanka

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This study integrates the resource demand and social exchange perspectives and assesses if employer brand, organizational politics, self-efficacy, and family-work conflict predict employee engagement. Furthermore, this paper examines the impact of boundary conditions of employee engagement by focusing on exchange ideology and gender. Data were collected using questionnaires from 411 managerial employees working in licensed commercial banks in Sri Lanka. The results revealed that employer brand, perceived organizational politics, and self-efficacy were significantly related to employee engagement. The results, however, did not support the negative relationship between family-work conflict and employee engagement or the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between family-work conflict and employee engagement. But, exchange ideology moderated the relationship between employer brand and employee engagement albeit contrary to the hypothesized directions. The implications of this research, possible limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: employee engagement, employer brand, family-work conflict, perceived organizational politics, self-efficacy

Key points

- 1 Employer brand, perceived organizational politics, and self-efficacy are significant predictors of employee engagement.
- 2 Family-work conflict does not relate to employee engagement.
- 3 Exchange ideology moderates the relationship between employer brand and employee engagement but contrary to the hypothesized directions.
- 4 Gender does not moderate the relationship between family-work conflict and employee engagement.

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Introduction

Given the role of employee engagement in work performance and competitive advantage, this concept has attracted widespread attention among academics and practitioners (Albrecht, Breidahl and Marty 2018). It is therefore not surprising that organizations are 'consistently ranking the development of an engaged workforce as an organizational priority' (Shuck and Wollard 2010, 90). Employee engagement refers to 'the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances' (Kahn 1990, 694). Several researchers have noted that employee engagement relates to various organizational outcomes, including employee productivity, achievement of organizational goals, customer satisfaction, and talent retention (Kim, Kolb and Kim 2013; Kuntz and Roberts 2014).

Many studies (e.g. Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011; Saks and Gruman 2014) have been conducted to identify the antecedents of employee engagement. These antecedents can be categorized into job demands (e.g. role conflict and role overload), job resources (e.g. feedback and supportive co-workers), personal resources (e.g. self-efficacy and self-esteem), and leadership (e.g. transformational leadership and empowering leadership). These studies have provided an important insight to better understand the drivers of employee engagement. Despite the attention and effort being directed toward research and practice with regard to the factors that foster engagement, it has been reported that employee engagement is on the decline and there has been an increasing disengagement among employees in many countries (Gallup 2018). In their latest state of the global workforce report, Gallup (2018) revealed that only 15% of employees across the world are engaged at work while 85% of employees are actively disengaged or not engaged. This apparent engagement gap leads to the question what makes employees engaged, and, thus, highlights the need for more research to explore the impact of a broad range of antecedents of employee engagement and to understand the boundary conditions under which employees are more or less likely to engage (Karatepe, Ozturk and Kim 2019; Saks and Gruman 2014).

Moreover, the existing research has examined employee engagement mainly from the resource demand perspective – the job-demand resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, 2008) and conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 2001). The JD-R model classifies the characteristics of work environment either as job resources or job demands and assumes two independent psychological processes (Bakker and Demerouti 2008). The motivational process focuses on job resources as the determinants of positive psychological and organizational outcomes while the health impairment process focuses on job demands as determinants of negative psychological and organizational outcomes. Personal resources and demands have been added later to the original JD-R model by drawing on the COR theory to acknowledge the influence of personal resources and demands on employee engagement. However, the JD-R model does not explain why employees engaged different levels when every employee has access to the same job