



An integrative literature review on employee engagement in the field of human resource development: exploring where we are and where we should go

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Abstract

Numerous studies on employee engagement in the HRD (human resource development) field have contributed to the promotion of employee engagement in organizations, yet issues and challenges remain. The purpose of this study is to investigate how employee engagement has been discussed in four representative HRD journals: *Human Resource Development Review (HRDR)*, *Human Resource Development International (HRDI)*, *Human Resource Development Quarterly (HRDQ)*, and *Advances in Developing Human Resources (ADHR)*. We conduct a literature review based on Torraco's (Hum Resour Dev Rev 4(3):356–367, 2005) framework, resulting in the selection of 24 articles for further review: 10 empirical articles and 14 conceptual articles. These articles are then classified, summarized, and synthesized by year of publication, research type and aim, and analysis of findings. Based on the results of the literature review, we analyze and identify the current state of employee engagement research in the HRD field and suggest implications for HRD scholars and practitioners.

Keywords Employee engagement · Literature review · Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD)

Introduction

Over the past two decades, positive organizational behavior has gained considerable attention from HRD scholars, researchers, and practitioners (Shuck and Wollard 2010). The role of positivity in the workplace is becoming an emerging domain because the longstanding deficit-based approach, which relies on highlighting problems to transform organizations, has given rise to negative consequences (Kim et al. 2013). That is, focusing on an organization's current predicament and consistently delivering negative messages to employees (e.g., messages of crisis, dysfunction, and conflict) makes employees anxious and increases their strain. Thus, a recognition of the need for positivity, which can support employees' well-being and improve their performance, is emerging (Luthans 2002; Sweetman

and Luthans 2010). Due to this paradigm shift, the term *employee engagement* is becoming increasingly popular in the literature of various fields, including human resources, organizational psychology, leadership, and education. This popularity is due in part to the fact that professional societies and consulting groups have begun to report the positive organizational outcomes of engaged employees (Shuck and Wollard 2010). Today, HRD-driven studies focusing on employee engagement are conducted with increasing frequency. In 2010, for example, the AHRD Conference in the Americas featured only two presentations on employee engagement, with topics including job engagement, work engagement, and employee engagement. In contrast, in 2015, the conference featured 14 presentations on the same topic. Only 4 out of the 14 presenters discussed their empirical studies; however, the rest of the presentations were related to conceptual model developments, literature reviews, and measurement analyses. The variety of types of studies on employee engagement shared at the AHRD conference represents evidence that this term is considered an emerging domain in the HRD research field.

First conceptualized by Kahn (1990), employee engagement is defined as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and

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express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). In other words, engaged employees invest significant amounts of energy into their work roles since they physically, cognitively, and emotionally attach to their work. This definition has been corroborated by empirical studies demonstrating that individuals who identify with their work are less likely to be plagued by turnover intentions and absenteeism (Saks 2006; Schaufeli et al. 2009; Shuck et al. 2014). In research on the relationship between engagement and organizational outcomes, employees’ engagement in their work has also been found to have a positive influence on knowledge creation, customer loyalty, individual performance, and financial returns (Salanova et al. 2005; Song et al. 2012; Xanthopoulou et al. 2009). Given the various benefits of employee engagement in organizations, it is unsurprising that employee engagement has sparked HRD scholars’ interest.

Numerous studies on employee engagement have been conducted in the field of HRD, thereby contributing to the promotion of employee engagement in organizations; yet issues and challenges remain. For example, two of the issues that have yet to be addressed in the literature are the inconsistent definitions of the concept and the lack of rigorous academic scrutiny surrounding them (Macey and Schneider 2008; Shuck and Wollard 2010). Although scholars agree that a consistent definition and its clear interpretation are important for arriving at concrete research results and understanding the results’ implications for organizations, such a definition still has not been established. Combined with HRD scholars’ efforts to conceptualize and examine employee engagement across diverse organizational contexts, this need for a definition renders our investigation of empirical and conceptual studies on employee engagement within the four representative journals of AHRD especially relevant for charting a trajectory of the concept.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how employee engagement has been understood and discussed within the HRD. In conducting this study, we systematically reviewed and analyzed four AHRD-sponsored journals: *Human Resource Development Review* (HRDR), *Human Resource Development International* (HRDI), *Human Resource Development Quarterly* (HRDQ), and *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (ADHR). We selected these four journals because they include systematic studies on the development of HRD theories as well as the application of HRD research findings. They are also some of the most influential journals in the AHRD field and thus are representative of the conversations about engagement that are driving academic and professional research today. This study contributes to a better understanding of the current literature on employee engagement, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative literature, and proposes a future agenda for research on employee engagement in the HRD field.

Methods

The literature review method is a relevant and distinguished form of research for summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing an extant body of literature regarding a certain phenomenon (Chermack and Passmore 2005; Torraco 2005). Torraco (2005) explained that a literature review can generate knowledge about either mature or emerging topics through four of common forms of synthesis: a research agenda, a taxonomy or other conceptual classification of constructs, alternative models or conceptual frameworks, and meta-theory. This study followed the integrative literature review framework suggested by Torraco (2005), given that employee engagement is an emerging topic and this study aimed to both investigate relevant relationships and perspectives on employee engagement and suggest an agenda for its further research and practice in the field of HRD. For this reason, in this section, we describe how we searched for and selected relevant studies, as well as how we organized and analyzed them.

Description of selection process

Using Torraco’s (2005) framework as a guide, we began by choosing relevant literature for the study. Recognizing that a clear outline of method is vital in a literature review, this study adopted the following selection criteria: (a) where articles were found; (b) when the search was performed; (c) who conducted the search; (d) how the articles were searched; (e) how many articles initially collected and how many were finally chosen; and (f) why the articles were finally selected (Callahan 2010; Carasco-Saul et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2013).

In undertaking the initial search in August 2015, we used several databases such as those of ProQuest and EBSCO, which were able to provide all of the references to articles published in four of the major HRD journals sponsored by AHRD: *HRDR*, *HRDQ*, *HRDI*, and *ADHR*. With regard to keyword combinations, the main focus of our research was on how employee engagement has been conceptualized and examined, both theoretically and empirically, in relation to other research variables. Given that the term *employee engagement* often seems to be used interchangeably with other similar terms, such as work engagement, job engagement, role engagement, or personal engagement (Carasco-Saul et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2013), the search keyword “engagement” was understood to be a more comprehensive concept. In order to narrow the scope of the review, we confined our search to peer-reviewed articles published in English-language journals in which the exact keyword appeared in either the title or the abstract. There was no specific time period selected. The initial search that was performed utilizing engagement as its keyword yielded 61 sources from

the four specified HRD journals. Subsequently, a staged review, which is an approach in which researchers perform an initial review of the abstracts before providing an in-depth review of the selected articles (Torraco 2005), was used to review the 61 articles and identify relevant articles for the research purpose of this study. When conducting the staged review, the primary focus was on whether an article conceptualized and examined engagement itself or it explored the relationship between engagement and related research variables. Thus, articles were excluded if the abstract merely mentioned engagement as a term or broadly described the relationship between engagement and its related variables. Duplicate articles were also eliminated. Finally, in an effort to perform as comprehensive a search as possible, forthcoming articles offered by the Online First and Early View features of the four journals were examined, resulting in the selection of two articles for further review. Through this process, a total of 24 articles were identified for further review (22 articles out of 61 and 2 forthcoming articles). This selection included 10 empirical and 14 conceptual articles.

Data organization and analysis

The 24 articles finally chosen for the study were summarized, analyzed, and synthesized in accordance with their classification as empirical or conceptual studies. A summary of the selected literature appears in Tables 2 and 3. The summary consists of authors, purposes, key findings and implications, and sample information. We classified, examined, and synthesized the research on either engagement itself or the relationship between engagement and its related research variables, including how employee engagement has been conceptualized and has been shown to interact with other research variables.

Overview of employee engagement literature

This section provides a review of the extant literature investigating the effects of employee engagement in various contexts. Table 1 and Fig. 1 provide an overview of the volume of engagement-related research that has been published in terms of journals, types of articles, and annual frequency.

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that more than half of the conceptual studies selected for this review (8 out of 14, or 57.1%) were published in *HRDR*; that most of the empirical studies (8 out of 10, or 80%) were issued in *HRDI* and *HRDQ*; and that the overall number of conceptual studies is higher than that of empirical studies. An investigation of the annual frequency of the published articles shown in Fig. 1 reveals that engagement literature began to appear in these four journals in 2010, and research efforts have been

Table 1 Sources and types of studies on employee engagement in AHRD journals

Journals	Types	
	Empirical studies	Conceptual studies
Human Resource Development Review	0	8
Human Resource Development International	4	2
Human Resource Development Quarterly	4	1
Advances in Developing Human Resources	2	3
Total	10	14

steadily increasing since then, with the exception of 2013. A noticeable increase in 2011 was due to the special issue of *ADHR* published on the topic of “Employee Engagement & HRD,” while the increase in 2014 was due to an issue of *HRDQ* published on the topic of “Engagement.”

Findings from selected literature on employee engagement

Findings from empirical studies

Among the selected literature, 10 out of the 24 articles were identified as empirical studies. These studies can be categorized according to the following two purposes: (a) to compare different measurements and concepts of engagement in relation to other research variables, and (b) to investigate engagement’s relationship to other variables. The key findings from the 10 selected empirical articles are presented below.

Comparing different measurements and concepts of engagement

Using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the data collected from 304 workers in the United Kingdom, Fletcher (2015) explored the mediating effects of both personal role engagement and work engagement on the relationship between training perceptions (independent) and work role behaviors (dependent) after controlling for gender, age, and tenure. The results indicated that personal role engagement had a stronger effect on the relationship between training perceptions and task proficiency ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$) and on the relationship between training perceptions and task adaptability ($\beta = 0.39, p < .001$), while work engagement was not significant. Fletcher (2015) then compared the degrees of the two types of engagement. No difference in the mediating effects of these two types of engagement on the relationship between training perceptions and task proactivity (work

Table 2 A summary of the selected literature on engagement

Authors	Purpose	Sample (<i>n</i>)	Measurement	Key findings
Comparing different measurements and concepts on engagement in relation to other variables				
Fletcher (2015)	To explore the mediating effects of both personal role engagement and work engagement on the relationship between training perceptions and work role behaviors, and compare the degrees of two engagements	<i>n</i> = 304 (UK)	UWES-9	Personal role engagement has a stronger effect on the relationship between training perceptions and task proficiency, and training perceptions and task adaptability. However, there is no difference between the mediating effects of the two engagements on the relationship between training perceptions and task proactivity
Soane et al. (2012)	To develop ISA engagement scale and investigate its effect on task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intention controlling the UWES	<i>n</i> = 540 (UK), <i>n</i> = 683 (UK)	ISA, UWES-17	ISA is more suitable and contributes further to explain outcome variables such as task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover intention than the UWES
Investigating relationships of engagement with other variables				
De Clercq et al. (2014)	To investigate the moderating effect of goal congruence and social interaction on the relationship between servant leadership and work engagement	<i>n</i> = 239 (Ukraine)	UWES-9	Servant leadership has an effect on work engagement, but goal congruence and social interaction are not significant. Their moderating effects are not significant or controversial
Sarti (2014)	To examine the effect of job resources, including learning opportunity, decision authority, supervisor support, coworker support, performance feedback, and financial rewards, on work engagement	<i>n</i> = 167 (Italia)	UWES-9	Learning opportunity, coworker support, and supervisor support have a positive effect on work engagement
Shuck et al. (2014)	To explore the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between perceived support for participation in HRD practices and intention to turnover	<i>n</i> = 207 (US)	JES	Employee engagement and its components, such as cognitive, emotional, behavioral engagement, have partial mediating effects
Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012)	To examine the moderating effects of perceptions of HRD practices between relationship engagement and organizational citizenship behavior	<i>n</i> = 552 (Thai)	UWES-9	Engagement has an influence on organizational citizenship behavior, but the moderating effect of perceptions of HRD is not significant
Song et al. (2012)	To examine the mediating effect of employees' work engagement on the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational knowledge creation	<i>n</i> = 432 (Korea)	UWES-9	Employees' work engagement has a partial mediating effect
Fairlie (2011)	To investigate the relationship between meaningful work and employee outcomes, such as engagement, disengagement, exhaustion, and work adjustment, as well as to test the effect of meaningful work on engagement after controlling for work characteristics	<i>n</i> = 574 (North America)	UWES-9	Meaningful work and work adjustment are positively correlated with engagement, while meaningful work was negatively correlated with disengagement and exhaustion. Meaningful work has a positive impact on engagement

Table 2 (continued)

Authors	Purpose	Sample (n)	Measurement	Key findings
Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011)	To examine the effects of supervisor and coworker incivility on engagement after controlling for gender and age	n = 272 (US)	WES	Supervisor and coworker incivility have a negative influence on safety and availability engagement, while both forms of incivility do not significantly affect meaningfulness engagement
Shuck et al. (2011)	To test the effect of employee engagement on discretionary effort and intention to turnover after controlling for job fit, affective commitment, and psychological climate	n = 283 (US)	May et al.'s (2004) scale	Meaningfulness, safety, and availability engagement do not have a significant effect on discretionary effort; on the other hand, meaningfulness and availability have a significant negative effect on intention to turnover, except for safety

ISA indicates the intellectual, social, affective engagement scale (Soane et al. 2012). It consists of intellectual engagement, social engagement, and affective engagement; UWES indicates the Utrecht work engagement scale. UWES-17 is the original scale, and UWES-9 is the short version scale of nine items (Schaufeli et al. 2006). It consists of vigor, dedication, and absorption; JES indicates 18-item job engagement scale (Rich et al. 2010). It consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement; May et al.'s (2004) scale (15-item) consists of meaningfulness, safety, and availability scales; WES indicates 16-item workplace engagement scale (Shuck 2010), a modified version of May et al.'s (2004) scale. It is comprised of meaningfulness, safety, and availability

engagement $\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$; personal role engagement $\beta = 0.22$, $p < .01$) was found.

Based on data from 278 British manufacturing employees, Soane et al. (2012) developed the Intellectual, Social, Affective (ISA) engagement scale incorporating the three selfsame facets of engagement; the researchers then confirmed the scale's internal reliability and construct validity. In the second part of the study, they adopted a usefulness analysis (Darlington 1968) to compare the ISA scale with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), and they investigated the effect of engagement by measuring outcome variables with ISA using data from 683 British retail employees. The hierarchical regression results when controlling for the UWES indicated that ISA was a more suitable measurement tool than the UWES for explaining in-role performance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .05$), organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < .05$), and turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < .05$).

Investigating relationships between engagement and other research variables

De Clercq et al. (2014) investigated the moderating effects of goal congruence and social interaction on the relationship between servant leadership (independent) and work engagement (dependent), using SEM to analyze data from 239 Ukrainian employees working in the information technology industry. They concluded that servant leadership had a statistically significant effect on work engagement ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$) but that goal congruence and social interaction were not statistically significant. Although the moderating effects of servant leadership and social interaction ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .05$) and of servant leadership, goal congruence, and social interaction ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .05$) were significant, the effects of both goal congruence and social interaction were not significant.

Adapting hierarchical multiple regression with data from 167 Italian caregivers, Sarti (2014) examined the effects of job resources, including learning opportunity, decision authority, supervisor support, coworker support, performance feedback, and financial rewards, on work engagement. The results of the study showed that learning opportunity ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$), coworker support ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$), and supervisor support ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .05$) had positive effects on work engagement; however, decision authority, performance feedback, and financial rewards were not significant at the level of .05.

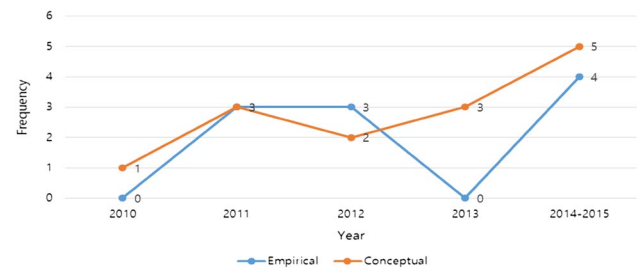
Adapting Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation testing method with data from 207 American healthcare workers, Shuck et al. (2014) explored the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between perceived support for participation in HRD practices (independent) and turnover intentions (dependent). Their results indicated

Table 3 A summary of conceptual studies in four representative journals

Authors	Purpose	Key implications
Alagaraja and Shuck (2015)	To explore the present perspectives of organizational alignment and employee engagement to better understand how they contribute to improving individual performance	Organizational alignment and employee engagement are interdependent. Engagement is more likely to occur in aligned work environment. Thus, organizations should create workplace structures where organizational goals are aligned with employees' job specifications and responsibilities to enhance their performance
Rana (2015)	To conceptually investigate the relationships between HIWPs and employee engagement	For employees to be highly engaged, organizations should support them with the following: (a) ample power to raise voice in decision-making; (b) information on diverse organizational issues; (c) reward system; and (d) knowledge about resources and chances to develop work competencies
Carasco-Saul et al. (2015)	To examine the relationship between leadership and employee engagement	Different leadership styles have been proposed to affect employee engagement directly and indirectly. Empirical explorations on the suggested conceptual models are recommended; investigated the role of engagement as a moderator variable
Saks and Gruman (2014)	To examine the existing definitions, theories, and measurements of employee engagement and propose an integrative theory on it	Employee engagement still remains unclear in terms of its meaning and measurement. For it to be effectively translated into practice, it is urgent to develop new measures of employee engagement based on Kahn's (1990) conceptualization and theory
Valentin (2014)	To understand employee engagement from a critical and discourse perspective	A critical and discourse lens reveals the misbelief that employees' and organizational goals are aligned. This has isolated employees' benefits and development within HR practices so far
Kim et al. (2013)	To investigate the relationship between work engagement and performance, utilizing an empirical literature review	A discrepancy between scholarly works and organizational needs stimulates further studies to be conducted, empirically testing the relationship between work engagement and performance. Also, various factors that influence work engagement found in the study may help organizations to assist employees' performance enhancement
Shuck (2013)	To provide close observation on Kim et al. (2013), which explored the connections between work engagement and performance	Extending the discussion from Kim et al. (2013), deeper exploration of Kahn's (1990) framework on engagement has been requested and the predomination of UWES has been criticized. Overall, the paper agrees on the future research agenda proposed by Kim et al. (2013)
Shuck and Rose (2013)	To reframe and explore the construct of employee engagement within the context of meaning and purpose	The mainstream perspective on employee engagement is to view it as an outcome. However, approaching engagement as a condition, engagement and enhanced performance are byproducts of meaningful and purpose-driven work
Shuck et al. (2012)	To review the conceptual utility of employee engagement within the HRD field and explore its relations to other similar constructs, namely, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement	Understanding the relations between the constructs provide theoretical underpinnings for developing HRD interventions on workplace learning and performance
Shuck and Herd (2012)	To examine the conceptual linkage between leadership behavior and employee engagement	A work environment that is meaningful and safe facilitates high engagement behaviors of employees. To make these foundational conditions, clear and shared communication of leaders is essential and they should show leadership, ideally moving from transactional to transformational leadership

Table 3 (continued)

Authors	Purpose	Key implications
Shuck (2011)	To synthesize present scholarly research on employee engagement	Academically, further refining is required to investigate how employee engagement differs from other organizational constructs and job attitudes. Also, different perspectives on engagement can be applied considering engagement contexts beyond workplaces
Wollard (2011)	To provide a new perspective in understanding employee engagement through the antithesis, disengagement	While disengagement brings huge costs for individuals and organizations, it has received scarce attention. Organizations should figure out what separates them disengaged workers and implement strategic interventions that encompass them
Wollard and Shuck (2011)	To explore antecedents that precede the development of employee engagement	Individual antecedents can be used by employees to self-evaluate their level of engagement. Practitioners can use organizational antecedents to figure out the strengths of organizations. Whether these antecedents get affected by individuals, organizations, and industry types remains unexplored
Shuck and Wollard (2010)	To explore the historical development of employee engagement; and to define and situate the concept within the HRD field	The newly proposed definition of employee engagement is comprehensive and provides solid foundation for future works to develop dimensions of the construct, theories, and models for practice

**Fig. 1** Annual frequency of types of articles on employee engagement in AHRD journals

that employee engagement and its components, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Rich et al. 2010), had partial mediating effects.

Song et al. (2012) examined the mediating effect of employees' work engagement on the relationship between transformational leadership (independent) and organizational knowledge creation (dependent) by analyzing data from 432 Korean workers. After controlling for age, gender, and education, the researchers found that employees' work engagement had a partial mediating effect ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .05$) on the relationship.

Using data collected from 552 Thai non-managerial employees, Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012) examined the moderating effects of perceptions of HRD practices on the relationship between engagement (independent) and organizational citizenship behavior (dependent), the latter of which consists of altruism, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and conscientiousness in their study. The results showed that engagement had an influence on altruism ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$), sportsmanship ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .001$), civic virtue ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$), courtesy ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < .05$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$), but the moderating effect of perceptions of HRD and engagement was not significant.

Based on data collected from 283 American employees, Shuck et al. (2011) tested the effects of employee engagement, comprising meaningfulness, safety, and availability (May et al. 2004), on discretionary effort and turnover intentions after controlling for job fit, affective commitment, and psychological climate. The results indicated that none of the components of employee engagement had a significant effect on discretionary effort. On the other hand, meaningfulness ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < .01$) and availability ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < .05$) had negative effects on turnover intentions, while safety did not.

Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011) examined the effects of supervisor and coworker incivility on engagement by analyzing data from 272 American computer-science professionals. Incivility is defined as "low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of

workplace norms for mutual respect” (Andersson and Pearson 1999, p. 457). After controlling for gender and age, the researchers found that supervisor incivility had a negative influence on safety ($\beta = -0.16, p < .05$) and availability engagement ($\beta = -0.27, p < .05$) and that coworker incivility had a negative influence on safety ($\beta = -0.32, p < .001$) and availability engagement ($\beta = -0.17, p < .05$). However, neither form of incivility significantly affected meaningfulness engagement.

Using data collected from 574 North American employees, Fairlie (2011) investigated the relationship between meaningful work and employee outcomes such as engagement, disengagement, exhaustion, and work adjustment. He also tested the effect of meaningful work on engagement after controlling for work characteristics (intrinsic rewards, extrinsic rewards, leadership and organizational features, supervisory relationships, coworker relationships, organizational support, and work demand and balance). The results showed that meaningful work was positively correlated with engagement ($r = .77$) and work adjustment ($r = .73$), while meaningful work was negatively correlated with disengagement ($r = -.77$) and exhaustion ($r = -.52$). Finally, meaningful work had a positive impact on engagement ($\beta = 0.64, p < .001$) after controlling for work characteristics.

Findings from conceptual studies

Among the 24 studies we examined, 14 could be classified as conceptual studies that either propose conceptual models of engagement or conduct literature reviews on the topic. These studies were categorized according to the aims of the research: (a) to explore the definition of engagement, (b) to examine different perspectives concerning its conceptualization, and (c) to investigate its relationship to other research variables.

Exploring definitions and conceptualizations of employee engagement

Shuck and Wollard (2010) pioneered the effort to define and interpret the concept of employee engagement in the field of HRD. Adopting a historical lens, the researchers explored various conceptualizations, ranging from the foundational work of Kahn (1990) to that of Macey and Schneider (2008). Synthesizing these approaches, the authors defined employee engagement as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (Shuck and Wollard 2010, p. 103). As already implied in the definition, three distinct dimensions of engagement were proposed: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

More recently, Saks and Gruman (2014) reviewed the numerous definitions, theories, and measurements of

employee engagement to provide an integrative theory of it. Their study showed that Kahn’s (1990) original definition of personal engagement and that of Schaufeli et al.’s (2002) are the ones that have been most frequently adopted among the studies they examined. Although the definitions proposed by the two studies share similarities in meaning, Saks and Gruman (2014) argued for following Kahn’s (1990) definition, since it is more encompassing and unique as it entails an employee’s complete self into the performance of a role, while Schaufeli et al.’s (2002) definition does not clearly distinguish engagement from the concept of burnout.

Other studies have taken different approaches to exploring the conceptualization of employee engagement. Shuck et al. (2012) examined how employee engagement can be differentiated from similar work-related constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement. Yet empirical questions remain as to whether the constructs are statistically linked or whether each one can be considered independent of the others.

Shuck (2011) conducted an integrative review of scholarly perspectives on employee engagement over time, in doing so building on earlier work by Shuck and Wollard (2010). The study revealed four major frameworks that have contributed to conceptualization of employee engagement: (a) Kahn’s (1990) need-satisfying perspective; (b) Maslach et al.’s (2001) burnout-antithesis perspective; (c) Harter et al.’s (2002) satisfaction-engagement perspective; and (d) Saks’s (2006) multidimensional perspective. No single perspective is academically superior to another or fits well in all HRD conditions. Rather, Shuck argued that it is more reasonable to consider the unique contexts of engagement before deciding which approach to take.

Still other researchers have challenged traditional or mainstream perspectives on conceptualizing employee engagement. Thus far, the majority of studies have posited engagement as a leveraging outcome towards performance. Shuck and Rose (2013), however, taking the “engagement as conditions” perspective, focused on understanding employee engagement in the context of meaning, and purpose of work. Stronger engagement occurs when meaningfulness and purposefulness are coupled, and performance is only a byproduct of this coupling.

Criticizing the pronounced attention on engaged employees, Wollard (2011) focused on understanding engagement’s antithesis, *disengagement*, which was first used by Kahn (1990). In his study, Wollard conceptualized disengagement as individuals distancing themselves gradually from their work roles and others in the workplace and argued that it leads to a lack of communication, exhaustion, and ultimately employee turnover, harming the productivity of organizations. Disengagement Yet the process by which individuals move from engagement to disengagement and the remedy for disengagement remain largely unexplored.

Taking a critical discourse approach, Valentin (2014) criticized the degree to which present employee engagement discourses center on organizations' stances. He emphasized that engagement should not be something to be "fixed" to achieve desired organizational goals. Rather, further critical reflection on engagement interventions should be encouraged so that HRD practices serve to benefit the development of employees, as well as that of organizations.

Exploring the relationship between employee engagement and other constructs

The rest of the examined studies discussed here explored how employee engagement relates to other constructs. In particular, leadership has been treated as a key construct that interacts with engagement. Shuck and Herd (2012), for example, investigated how leadership behaviors stimulate the engagement of followers. At the very beginning of this cyclical model, according to Shuck and Herd, are employees' needs and motivation perceptions, which become the focus of leadership. Leaders then apply emotional intelligence to interact with employees and exhibit either transactional or transformational leadership depending on the level of the followers' needs. Both leadership styles facilitate employee engagement, leading to followers' performance improvement, which cycles back to affect their training needs and motivation.

Carasco-Saul et al. (2015) also found that various leadership styles, including the transformational, ethical, and authentic styles, link differently to employee engagement. In a review of literature, the researchers observed that transformational leadership has been shown to positively affect employee engagement on an individual level. Employee engagement mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance as well. Meanwhile, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and charismatic leadership influence employment engagement through various mediators, though there are few empirical studies on these leadership styles.

Saks and Gruman (2014) proposed an integrative theory of leadership (namely, the transformational, leader-member exchange, and empowering leadership styles) as an antecedent for a certain set of job resources and psychological conditions, eventually leading to various configurations of employee engagement (i.e., task, work, group/team, and organization). Given that leaders choose different styles of leadership depending on their given situations, the aforementioned studies suggest the need for more comprehensive research that includes multiple leadership styles and these styles' relationships to engagement.

The potential links between employee engagement and other key constructs in HRD practices have been

examined as well. Wollard and Shuck (2011) investigated the antecedents of employee engagement as a foundation for theory-building and practical applications. Through a comprehensive literature review, 42 antecedents were identified and then distinguished by two levels—individual and organizational. Yet only 24 of them were empirically proven, and the rest required statistical evidence through further testing. In addition, it was clear that the antecedents were not process-dependent but functioned differently across multiple conditions, such as industry type and organizational culture.

Kim et al. (2013) explored the relationship between work engagement and performance within organizations. The researchers showed that work engagement positively affected performance, both directly and indirectly. It also mediated the relationship among antecedents such as self-efficacy, coaching, values congruence, and organizational support and performance. Other factors, such as service climate and job embeddedness, were proven to mediate the relationship between work engagement and performance.

As a critique of the prior research by Kim et al. (2013), Shuck (2013) extended his discussion of the relationship between work engagement and performance. He underlined the further scholarly efforts to develop conceptual models of engagement. Yet he emphasized that these efforts should not aim at expanding new application tools in practice but instead at generating the contexts for engagement. In particular, he argued for the conceptual framework suggested by Shuck and Reio (2011), which builds on that of Kahn (1990).

More recently, Alagaraja and Shuck (2015) presented a conceptual model of the organizational alignment–employee engagement relationship, which facilitates individual performance as the dynamic outcome. According to the proposed model, when individual skills and knowledge, job characteristics, and organizational systems are integrated, there is a dynamic alignment–engagement interaction that contributes to the achievement of organizational goals.

Rana (2015) explored the effects of a set of high-involvement work practices (HIWPs) on employee engagement. HIWPs, or a set of practices aimed at cultivating employees' skills, motivation, and empowerment, consist of four core attributes, which are power, information, reward, and knowledge. This bundle of practices positively impacts job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Butts et al. 2009), and fosters organizational competitiveness, but its linkage with employee engagement remains underexplored. Addressing this gap in the literature, Rana laid the conceptual groundwork for understanding HIWPs as the antecedent and employee engagement as the outcome.

Discussion

Understanding where we are various approaches or disagreement?

While Wollard and Shuck (2011) found a dearth of studies on engagement when they were writing in 2011, studies on engagement have come to appear more frequently in recent years. Indeed, at the time Wollard and Shuck conducted their research, there had not been a single paper on engagement published in either *HRDI* or *HRDQ*. Given that more than 20 years had passed since Kahn's (1990) first mention of engagement, the relatively small number of empirical studies seemed unlikely.

The selected studies here have focused on distinct aspects of engagement that are signaled by the terms used: "employee engagement" (18 studies); "work engagement" (5 studies); and "engagement" (1 study). Even though

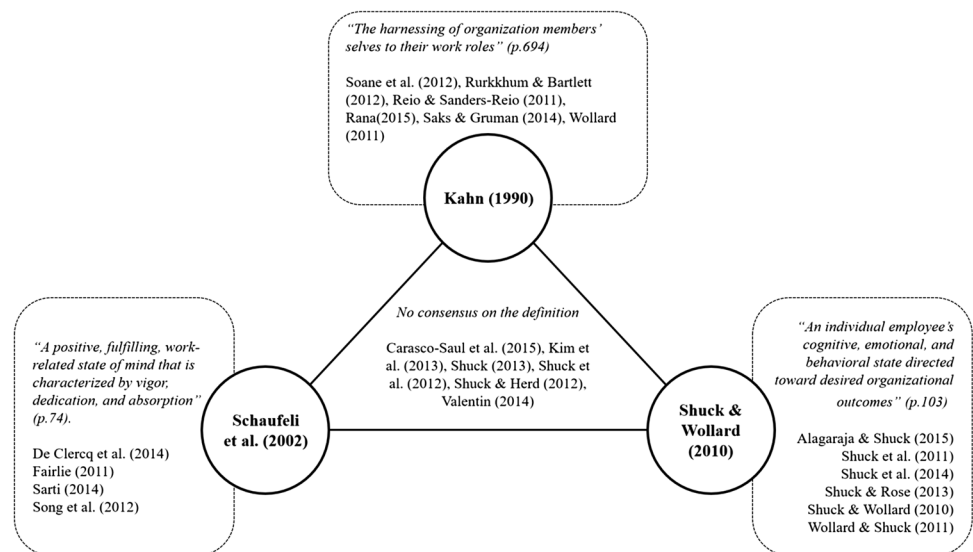
some empirical studies use the same term, however, they may define engagement differently. For example, Fairlie (2011), Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012), and Shuck et al. (2011) all used "employee engagement," but the studies differed in the definitions they adopted, following the definitions of Schaufeli et al. (2002), Kahn (1990), and Shuck and Wollard (2010), respectively. Furthermore, the examined studies used a variety of measurements. The UWES was the most popular instrument used in the studies (Saks and Gruman 2014), but the researchers indicated that they had tried to use other components and measurements as well. Table 4 presents the details of the adopted terms and definitions of engagement in the examined studies and Fig. 2 shows the definitions of engagement by research.

As shown in Table 4, studies on engagement have been conducted in various ways. Nevertheless, a pronounced tendency among scholars is to define employee engagement using Kahn's (1990) and Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) definitions (6 times and 5 times, respectively). Many researchers have

Table 4 Overview of the explored studies

Author	Adopted term	Definition
Empirical studies		
Fletcher (2015)	Work engagement	"A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al. 2002, p. 74)
De Clercq et al. (2014)	Work engagement	Schaufeli et al. (2002)
Sarti (2014)	Work engagement	Schaufeli et al. (2002)
Shuck et al. (2014)	Employee engagement	"An individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (Shuck and Wollard 2010, p. 103)
Song et al. (2012)	Work engagement	Schaufeli et al. (2002)
Soane et al. (2012)	Employee engagement	Based on Kahn's (1990) theory, engagement has three facets (intellectual, social, and affective) that meet the three conditions (a work role focus, activation, and positive affect)
Rurkkhum and Bartlett (2012)	Employee engagement	"The harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles" (Kahn 1990, p. 694)
Shuck et al. (2011)	Employee engagement	Shuck and Wollard (2010)
Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011)	Employee engagement	Kahn (1990)
Fairlie (2011)	Employee engagement	Schaufeli et al. (2002)
Conceptual studies		
Alagaraja and Shuck (2015)	Employee engagement	Shuck and Wollard (2010)
Rana (2015)	Employee engagement	Kahn(1990)
Carasco-Saul et al. (2015)	Employee engagement	(Did not provide an agreed-upon definition)
Saks and Gruman (2014)	Employee engagement	Kahn (1990)
Valentin (2014)	Employee engagement	(Did not provide an agreed-upon definition)
Kim et al. (2013)	Work engagement	(Did not provide an agreed-upon definition)
Shuck (2013)	Engagement	(Did not provide an agreed-upon definition)
Shuck and Rose (2013)	Employee engagement	Shuck and Wollard (2010)
Shuck et al. (2012)	Employee engagement	(Did not provide an agreed-upon definition)
Shuck and Herd (2012)	Employee engagement	(Did not provide an agreed-upon definition)
Wollard (2011)	Employee engagement	Kahn (1990)
Wollard and Shuck (2011)	Employee engagement	Shuck and Wollard (2010)
Shuck and Wollard (2010)	Employee engagement	Shuck and Wollard (2010)

Fig. 2 Definitions of employee engagement in the selected literature



also used the UWES and its components, which are vigor, dedication, and absorption.

However, Saks and Gruman (2014) pointed out that the UWES is inconsistent with Kahn's (1990) definition. This inconsistency was also noted in Rurkkhum and Bartlett's (2012) study. This indicates that the empirical studies have not yet established a consensus for the definition and measurement of employee engagement. This may reduce the consistency of results in studies on employee engagement, as identical terms are being used despite disparate meanings and measurements.

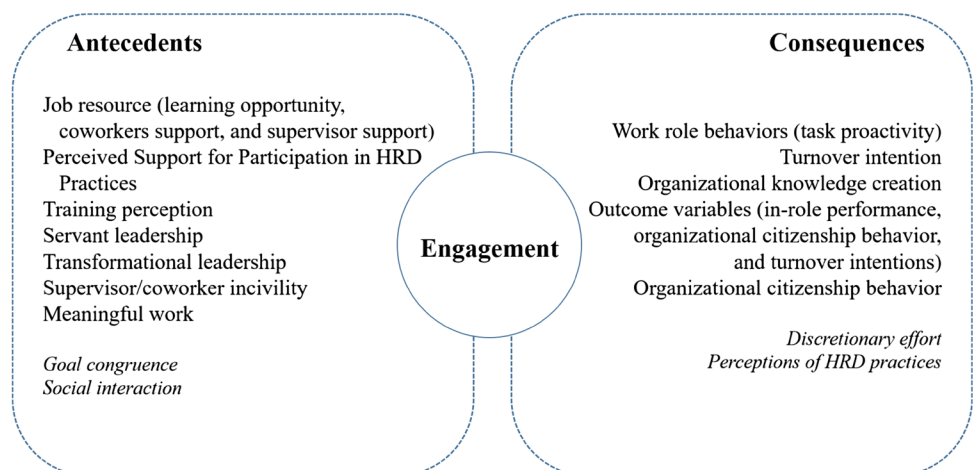
How are the findings of empirical and conceptual studies related to each other?

Figure 3 is derived from a synthesis of antecedents and consequences of engagement in selected empirical studies. Training perceptions, servant leadership, transformational

leadership, job resources, perceived support for participation in HRD practices, supervisor/coworker incivility, and meaningful work are identified as antecedents of engagement; work role behaviors, turnover intention, organizational knowledge creation, outcome variables, and organizational citizenship behavior are considered outcomes of engagement. With the exception of incivility, all of the variables have been addressed in conceptual studies, which show that empirical studies may follow the frameworks put forth in conceptual studies. On the other hand, goal congruence, social interaction, discretionary effort, and perceptions of HRD practices were used in the empirical studies, but their statistical significance has not been verified.

The most frequently used variable among the antecedents is transformational leadership, which is especially central to the concerns of Shuck and Herd (2012), Carasco-Saul et al. (2015), and Saks and Gruman (2014). More specifically, transactional, and transformational

Fig. 3 Antecedents and consequences of engagement in selected empirical studies



leadership (Shuck and Herd 2012); transformational, authentic, charismatic, and ethical leadership (Carasco-Saul et al. 2015); and transformational, LMX, and empowering leadership (Saks and Gruman 2014) have been proposed as antecedents of engagement in conceptual studies, while servant leadership (De Clercq et al. 2014) has been examined as an antecedent in empirical research.

The reason for the number of studies on leadership might be that leadership, especially transformational leadership, plays a role in creating the conditions that lead engagement directly and indirectly (Macey and Schneider 2008; Song et al. 2013). In fact, in looking at the components of transformational leadership, it is not difficult to see that the components are conceptually highly correlated with engagement. In Shuck and Herd (2012), for example, transformational leadership consisted of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leadership encourages employees to understand vision and goals clearly and to develop their potential contribution to provide a suitable environment in which to engage. As shown in the present study, however, the study of different types of leadership is relatively insufficient due to the limited focus on transformational leadership, consequently requiring more research that explores different leadership styles.

In considering engagement, leadership is joined by job resources, the latter of which have been examined empirically by Sarti (2014) and studied conceptually by Saks and Gruman (2014). According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), job resources encompass supervisor/coworker support, task identity, task significance, and autonomy. Accordingly, perceived support for participation in HRD practices (Shuck et al. 2014), training perceptions (Fletcher 2015), and meaningful work (Fairlie 2011) can be considered job resources that stimulate individual growth and development. Among conceptual studies, power, information, reward, and knowledge (Rana 2015), as well as a significant number of the 42 antecedents (Wollard and Shuck 2011), may also be included in job resources.

On the other hand, turnover intentions (3 times) and organizational citizenship behavior (2 times) are frequently seen as consequences of employee employment. However, turnover intentions and organizational citizenship behavior can be understood not only as outcomes of engagement, but also as outcomes of employee performance. Thus, other consequent variables may also be considered as a performance. Studies that focus on outcomes of engagement include Kim et al. (2013) and Alagaraja and Shuck (2015); both studies assumed that performance was an outcome. This implies that engagement has been studied as a strong driver of individual and organizational development's ultimate goal: performance improvement.

Identifying where we should go

Recommendations for HRD practitioners

Recognizing that the extant research confirms the beneficial results of heightening employee engagement (Wollard and Shuck 2011), many organizations have been drawn to embrace employee engagement as one of the strategies for enhancing their performance. In this quest to improve employees' engagement levels, HRD practitioners are on the front lines. We hope that this paper provides the practitioners with helpful insights for self-evaluating the conventional engagement interventions, setting new goals, and implementing new approaches in their organizations.

While employee engagement has been mainly considered from an organizational stance (Shuck and Wollard 2010), our findings from the examined literature clearly indicate that engagement should also be understood from employees' perspective. That is, given that engagement cannot be compelled by others but is mainly driven by individuals, future approaches for enhancing employee engagement should integrate efforts to understand the conditions that affect employees' work on the individual level.

For example, Wollard and Shuck (2011) identified the factors that contribute to employee engagement on two levels, organizational and individual, and suggested that different strategies should be pursued to boost employee engagement. A number of other researchers (e.g., Fairlie 2011; Shuck and Rose 2013; Valentin 2014) share this line of thought. Employees are more engaged when they develop their own sense of purpose and meaning in their work, rather than having their purpose handed down to them via external demands. When this condition is met, employees better understand their roles and take on more responsibilities, and supervisors' leadership behaviors become more influential on the employees' levels of engagement.

This is not to say that understanding employee engagement at the individual level is more important than understanding it at the organizational level. However, many of the existing studies have tended to focus on the organizational level, which distorts the nature of employee engagement. It is often overlooked that the individuals differ in their interests, readiness, and experiences in work. Instead of offering uniform interventions at the organizational level, organizations should take into account the conditions that promote individual growth and work satisfaction. That is, for a balanced approach to employee engagement, organizations should embrace both the perspectives, the individual and the organizational levels.

In this regard, the current literature review raises several fundamental questions that HRD practitioners should consider asking about their organizations: "Does the organization strive to foster a work environment that is safe and

meaningful to employees?,” “What are the current goals the organization aims to achieve as an outcome of enhanced employee engagement?,” and “Does the organization care about disengaged employees, and how are these employees’ concerns being addressed?” When individuals engage more with their tasks and jobs, they cultivate unique skills and competencies that add advantages to organizations, strengthening their competitiveness. Recognizing this, HRD practitioners should become active communicators in order to connect the needs and views of individual employees and of organizations. If they do so, it will become possible to develop more effective engagement interventions.

Recommendations for HRD scholars

Further development of employee engagement theory is invited through active communication between academics and practitioners in the HRD field. As discussed above, while “employee engagement” has garnered increased attention over the past decades, there is no single, integrated understanding of the term. Indeed, the term has even been interpreted differently by scholars in the field, which may have impeded the development of measurement tools and a concrete theory on engagement. Thus, despite the current popularity of the concept, its academic exploration remains at an early stage.

Given where we stand today, we encourage future scholars to participate in conversations about the terminology used in discussing employee engagement—the concept’s meaning, dimensions, and other underlying issues. Some scholars have insisted that a single definition of the concept is not required, as it may unnecessarily delimit the realm of employee engagement, which has not established its territory in the field yet. However, if the definition was clarified, endeavors to research and develop measurement tools would more frequently surface, helping scholars to form the building blocks of a theoretical foundation. An agreed-upon definition and the identification of its components would spur the further refinement of this theory. Otherwise, the lack of consensus around employee engagement may prevent the concept from moving beyond its role as a buzzword of this era and stifle the creation of an effective linkage between research and practical interventions.

On the other hand, Bakker and Leiter (2010)’s argument that the relationship between employee engagement and performance is still a matter of speculation and that the relationship may be explained by various mechanisms (e.g., increased job resources, appropriateness of distribution, and organizational culture) remains valid. In the JD-R model, performance is roughly divided into in-role and extra-role performances, and the relationship between employee engagement and performance may become more complex and multi-faceted depending on what is regarded

as performance. These results of this study confirm that organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions are viewed as representative performance variables in the HRD field. Identifying the various mechanisms that explain the effects of employee engagement on these performance variables should be a topic of future engagement research. Further research is also needed to explore the relationship between employee engagement and other leadership styles. Such research may be a clue to decipher the black box surrounding the relationship between employee engagement and performance, as mentioned by Bakker and Leiter (2010).

Employee engagement has been widely studied not only in the fields of HRD and management, but also in non-HRD fields such as healthcare. Because this study limited the scope of its research to the HRD field, a direct comparison between the HRD field and the non-HRD fields could not be made. However, setting this narrower scope allowed us to better focus on characterizing the engagement research within the HRD field. In fact, we can confirm that the focus and context of the engagement research in the HRD field reflects the unique identity of the HRD field and concerns on topics such as leadership, turnover intentions, and performance. However, our study calls for various academic endeavors to explore engagement that actively incorporates the identity of the HRD field by centering research focus on the core topics in the field such as learning and training. For example, Lee et al. (2016) extended the JD-R model to career development as an HRD-specific domain. If such studies continue to appear, scholars will be able to conduct more expansive research on the conceptualization of the HRD field-optimized engagement; they will also be able to apply the JD-R model to HRD-specific domains such as leadership and career development.

Exploring the niche of the HRD field

Since the primary purpose of this study was to investigate and synthesize employee engagement research within the HRD field, the examined studies on employee engagement were primarily those that had been published by the four aforementioned representative journals in the AHRD field. However, in other fields that are related to the HRD field (e.g., business, human resource management, organizational behavior, organizational psychology, and nursing), the concepts of work engagement and employee engagement have also received much attention and related studies have increased gradually over the past decade. Thus, taking a close look at how engagement has been studied in HRD-related fields and comparing those findings to the findings of the current study may help us obtain more comprehensive insight into how to best conceptualize and investigate employee engagement in the HRD field. That is, comparing the results of this integrative review with the findings from

other disciplines may guide us in exploring and identifying the unique niche that the HRD field occupies in relation to employee engagement.

In the fields of human resource management and organizational behavior, systematic review and meta-analysis literature on work engagement interventions have been published (e.g., Knight et al. 2017), revealing the need to expand the scope of studies on improving work engagement through interventions including HRD training. A study from the field of nursing (García-Sierra et al. 2016) reported results that are very consistent with those of this study, which suggests the necessity of studying work engagement in consideration of employees' learning opportunities in the HRD field.

There was a shared understanding about the conceptualization and chosen measurement used to determine employee engagement among the studies in HRD and other disciplines. García-Sierra et al. (2016) analyzed 24 quantitative studies and concluded that employee engagement is conceptually different from burnout, although the terms are often interchangeably used. In the researchers' review, most of the empirical studies (22 studies) used the UWES. Knight et al. (2017) analyzed 20 studies and likewise found that the majority of them (19 studies) used the UWES. Simpson's (2009) literature review analyzing 20 studies also confirmed that employee engagement is used as a concept with unique characteristics that distinguish it from burnout. His study also showed that there are four theoretical models related to the conceptualization and measurement of employee engagement that can be found in the fields of business, organizational psychology, and nursing: Kahn's (1992) personal engagement model; Maslach and Leiter's (1997) work-life model, the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Demerouti et al. 2001); and Harter et al.'s (2003) employee engagement model. In the HRD field, the JD-R model is mainly utilized.

These selected studies from non-HRD fields provide meaningful insight into how the HRD field can tackle the employee engagement puzzle in the future. According to García-Sierra et al. (2016), performance, job satisfaction, and intentions to remain with a company were found to be outcomes of employee engagement; these findings are similar to our own here. Personal traits, professional characteristics, family issues, and work orientations were found to be individual antecedents. Areas of work-life, structural empowerment, and social support were found to be organizational antecedents. The researchers particularly emphasized optimism and self-efficacy as factors affecting the employee engagement of nurses. Research on transformational leadership in relation to employee engagement has been conducted in the fields of both HRD and nursing, but studies addressing servant leadership (e.g., De Clercq et al. 2014) and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Rurkkhum and Bartlett 2012; Soane et al. 2012) have only appeared in the HRD

field. In particular, in the field of nursing, personal learning throughout professional careers has been emphasized as a predictor of employee engagement (e.g., García-Sierra et al. 2016), yet this idea of learning opportunities has only been studied in the limited context of social and organizational support in the HRD field. The role of employee engagement in career development was recently emphasized in a conceptual model of career and work engagement proposed by Lee et al. (2016), but this research has not developed further into a discussion about learning through professional careers. Given that learning is a key component of the HRD field, future studies need to explore how personal learning endeavors and employee engagement relate to each other.

Knight et al. (2017) divided employee engagement interventions into the four categories of personal resource building, job resource building, leadership training, and health promotion. This distinction implies that employee engagement is related to personal resources, job resources, leadership, and health. The researchers' meta-analysis also showed that these interventions have a positive impact on employee engagement and components such as vigor, dedication, and absorption. Each category can be further examined from the learning and training perspectives in the HRD field. The findings of this study show that the research trend of employee engagement in the HRD field is similar to that of other fields. There are few studies that have adopted learning and training approaches, however, even though organizational learning (see, Cho et al. 2013) and structural on-the-job training (Cho 2009) have been recognized as likely to foster employee engagement and performance by nurturing employees' skills, talents, and motivations. The niche of the HRD field in relation to future employee engagement research should thus be found here.

Limitations

The findings and recommendations from this study contribute to facilitating idea sharing and discussion of topics related to employee engagement in academia. Given the purpose of the review, to understand how employee engagement has been conceptualized and investigated in the HRD field, we limited the scope of the examination to four representative journals within the field. Although this specific concentration was helpful in identifying the current location and the unique niche the HRD field occupies in relation to employee engagement, somewhat ironically, we acknowledge that the comprehensive understanding and academic progress around it in the HRD field can be promoted by looking into how it has been studied in the broader academic fields. Because employee engagement has received much attention across various disciplines, synthesizing how it has been approached in different academic fields and making

connections between these approaches and study findings create the new discussion threads relevant to the HRD field. Recognizing such importance, we compared the results of this integrative review with findings from the several studies on employee engagement from HRD-related fields where we found both similarities and differences on its conceptualization and measures. For future research, we strongly recommend to address this need and expand the scope of the examination to the academic field adjunct to HRD and their journals. For example, outside of the education field, *Performance Improvement Quarterly* (PIQ) and *European Journal of Training and Development* (EJTD) involve a high degree of focus to employee performance and training. In the same line, journals having a similar emphasis area from the fields of management and psychology can be further considered. These lines of investigating the trend of employment engagement literature are expected to provide meaningful insights to expanding research in the HRD field.

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