

Antecedents to Employee Engagement: A Structured Review of the Literature

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Abstract

The Problem.

Employee engagement is an emerging concept in the HRD literature, with demonstrated organizational benefits; yet little is known about its antecedents. The purpose of this article is to explore conceptual and empirically driven antecedents as well as differentiate the two perspectives.

The Solution.

As a result of a structured literature review method, 42 antecedents were grouped by application at the individual and organizational level.

The Stakeholders.

HRD researchers seeking to conduct original research in organizations, and practitioners interested in creating greater levels of engagement in their organizations will find the discussion and implications sections and the index tool valuable.

Keywords

structured literature review, employee engagement, antecedents, organization performance

Employee engagement is an emerging and evolving concept in the business, management, industrial/organizational psychology, and human resource development (HRD) fields. Shuck and Wollard (2010) recently defined the term *employee engagement* as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (p. 103). While seemingly new to the scholarly community and in particular to human resource development (HRD), since publication of

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original work by Kahn in 1990, more than 250 peer-reviewed articles have appeared in scholarly journals across a variety of academic disciplines (e.g., see Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010). Moreover, the emergence of articles appearing in HRD-sponsored proceedings and journals suggest that the concepts' development and interest is growing in the field (see, for example, Berry & Morris, 2008; Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Nimon, Zigarmi, Houson, Witt, & Diehl, 2011; Shuck, 2011).

Grounded in empirical evidence, there are well-researched axioms regarding the presence of employee engagement. For example, numerous studies suggest that the presence of higher levels of employee engagement significantly reduces turnover intention (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Saks, 2006; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). In addition, empirical evidence suggests that the presence of high levels of employee engagement is also thought to enhance job performance, task performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors, productivity, discretionary effort, affective commitment, continuance commitment, levels of psychological climate, and customer service (Christian et al., 2011; Fleming & Asplund, 2007; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010; Richman, 2006). Moreover, workplaces that successfully develop engaged employees report fewer accidents on the job and enjoy higher levels overall safety ratings (May, Gilson, Harter, 2004). Finally, employee engagement has been associated with higher levels of profit, overall revenue generation, and growth (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). From the research it seems clear, employee engagement matters.

The extant research has reported on the benefits of developing an engaged workforce and as a result, many organizations are turning to enhancing levels of engagement within their influence. Organizations are seeking ways to embrace the concept, designing development plans, and surveying their employees to find out what steps they need to take first (Ketter, 2008). While focus turns toward arriving at the state of engagement, research has suggested that there might be antecedents to engagement and that focusing on these antecedents could enhance, and perhaps aid in the development of an engaged workforce (Saks, 2006). Little research has purposefully focused here, especially in the HRD literature where practitioners are likely to turn for answers when asked to develop engagement-enhancing strategies. While some academically focused research has explored this area (see, for example, Saks, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck, Reio, et al., 2011) this gap in understanding represents a void in practice, not just in theory and research; a particularly unique problem for HRD. Practitioners who can identify potential antecedents within their organization may be better equipped to present viable strategies to stakeholders, identify potential challenges, and communicate with clearer vision and direction.

The literature would suggest that antecedents to employee engagement should be in place before organizations can reap the benefits of an engaged workforce (Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006). This is however not as simple as it first appears. The suggested antecedents to employee engagement are many although few have been extensively

empirically tested. There is little evidence for their use and as with most emerging concepts, antecedents that have been identified are scattered throughout a large literature base. The purpose of this article is to examine the identified antecedents of employee engagement, whether empirically examined or not, as a means to initially develop a comprehensive listing for use in theory building, research, and practice. The primary research question guiding this study was as follows: According to the research literature, what are the antecedents to the development of employee engagement? First the method will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the findings. Last, implications for HRD scholars and practitioners conclude the article.

Method

Structured literature review (Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008; Rocco, Stein, & Lee, 2003) was used as the method for this study. A structured literature review identifies data points in literature that inform new or emerging concepts using structured steps of analysis. Because employee engagement is an emerging topic still evolving in the literature, a structured literature review was conducted. The steps for this method included (a) identifying data streams representative of the concept under study, (b) choosing an analysis technique to view emergent data, and (c) using concept mapping as a technique for developing a graphic representation of uncovered data points. The selection of articles and concept mapping are discussed in the following sections.

Selection of Articles

First, data sources were identified and searched for their representation of the human resource development, human resource management, management, and psychology fields. PsycInfo, ABI/Inform, ASTD's Training & Development research database, the Society for Human Resource Management database, the Academy of Management database, all four *Academy of Human Resource Development* (AHRD) journals, and all AHRD conference proceedings were searched. Data sources were abstract queried using the single keyword "employee engagement," limited to articles with employee engagement appearing in the abstract or title, and published in peer reviewed, English language sources. The first mention of employee engagement in the scholarly literature comes from Kahn's (1990) conceptualization (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Consequently, the search does not contain articles published prior to 1990.

Second, a staged review of the literature was conducted. A staged review is the practice of initially reviewing only abstracts to determine relevancy and then reviewing relevant articles in depth (Torraco, 2005). For this study, all articles containing the phrase "employee engagement" were reviewed. Articles containing mention of antecedents of employee engagement were set aside, reviewed in depth, and categorized by each author. A total of 265 abstracts were reviewed (see Table 1). All duplicate articles ($n = 6$) were eliminated.

Table 1. Number of Selected Articles by Database Source

Database	Employee engagement
	Abstract & citation searches
PsycInfo	20
ABI/Inform	210
T & D, ASTD	10
SHRM journals	9
Academy of Management	5
AHRD conference papers (1998-2010)	7
HRD Review	3
HRD International	00
HRD Quarterly	00
Advances in HRD	11

Note: ASTD = American Society of Training and Development; SHRM = Strategic Human Resource Management; AHRD = Academy of Human Resource Development.

Discussion of Analysis

All 265 abstracts were printed and reviewed by both authors. Relational analysis (Palmquist, 2003) was used to identify variables and concepts that related to the antecedents of employee engagement. Relational analysis is a research technique used in text scanning to examine the relationship between identified concepts (Palmquist, 2003); in this case, relationships between employee engagement and antecedents were examined. Each author kept a separate journal with notes about any antecedent mentioned in the literature. After reviewing all the data and each author's notes, one organizing principle emerged: level of antecedent application. Thus, antecedents were placed into two categorical domains: (a) individual antecedents to employee engagement and (b) organizational antecedents to employee engagement. Following Fornes et al. (2008), a concept map was developed (see Figure 1) to depict a conceptual model of relationships between antecedents and employee engagement as identified in the literature. The map was used to address the primary focus of the purpose statement and is provided as a visual framework for operationalizing potential leverage points for HRD scholars and practitioners to improve, develop, debate, and further study employee engagement.

Discussion of Conceptual Model

Antecedents of employee engagement are defined as constructs, strategies, or conditions that precede the development of employee engagement and that come before an organization or manager reaps the benefits of engagement-related outputs (e.g., higher levels of productivity, lower levels of turnover). In parallel to the primary research ques-

Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement	Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement
Absorption ^a	Authentic corporate culture ^a
Available to engage	Clear expectations ^a
Coping style	Corporate social responsibility ^a
Curiosity	Encouragement
Dedication ^a	Feedback
Emotional fit	Hygiene factors
Employee motivation	Job characteristics ^a
Employee/work/family status	Job control
Feelings of choice & control	Job fit ^a
Higher levels of corporate citizenship ^a	Leadership
Involvement in meaningful work ^a	Level of task challenge ^a
Link individual and organizational goals ^a	Manager expectations ^a
Optimism	Manager self-efficacy ^a
Perceived organizational support ^a	Mission and vision
Self-esteem, self efficacy	Opportunities for learning
Vigor ^a	Perception of workplace safety ^a
Willingness to direct personal energies	Positive workplace climate ^a
Work/life balance ^a	Rewards ^a
Core self evaluation ^a	Supportive organizational culture ^a
Value Congruence ^a	Talent management
Perceived Organizational Support ^a	Use of strengths ^a

Figure 1. Individual-level and organizational-level antecedents of employee engagement
a. Denotes antecedent with empirical evidence.

tion, a conceptual model of the known antecedents to employee engagement developed as a result of the concept mapping process. Figure 1 depicts the known research on antecedents of employee engagement at the time of this article.

Antecedents were identified on two levels: (a) *individual antecedents* and (b) *organizational antecedents*. Individual antecedents were defined as constructs, strategies, and conditions that were applied directly to or by individual employees and that were believed to be foundational to the development of employee engagement. Organizational-level antecedents were defined as constructs, strategies, and conditions that were applied across an organization as foundational to the development of employee engagement and the structural or systematic level. Moreover, Figure 1 identifies both individual and organizational antecedents as well as indicating which antecedents are empirically or conceptually driven as identified in the review of literature. Eleven of the 21 individual antecedents were reported with empirical evidence. Thirteen of the 21 identified organizational antecedents were reported with at least some empirical evidence. Care was taken by each author to appropriately categorize each article and the reported antecedent(s) into the appropriate category. No organizational or individual antecedent overlapped between categories although, we suspect that further research is needed to shed light on overlapping domains; the connection seems quite plausible. The next section discusses a summary of the antecedents, both individual and organizational, to employee engagement.

Discussion of Antecedents to Employee Engagement

The literature has explored empirical and conceptual linkages to the development of employee engagement although often in disparate and disconnected conversations. More often, engagement is discussed as a behavioral outcome (Shuck & Wollard, 2010) and little attention is given to antecedents that potentially drive the *cognitive* and *emotional* states of engagement, which are believed to lead to the behavioral manifestation of what can be seen as engagement. The following sections explore the known literature on the antecedents of employee engagement starting with individual antecedents, followed by a summary of organizational antecedents.

Individual Antecedents

Employee engagement is an individual-level variable often measured at the organizational level (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Considering the enormous role of personality and individual factors of an employee's life both inside and outside of the workplace, little is known about individual antecedents of employee engagement and what variables contribute to the overall development of employee engagement. There are some linkages reported in the literature; this issue however is not without debate and critique.

For example, the role of a meaningful workplace environment and an employee's involvement in contextually meaningful work is thought to be related to employee engagement (May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010). The perception of emotionally, culturally, and physically safe environments, as individual factors, are also linked to the development of employee engagement as antecedents (May et al., 2004). Issues of work-life balance (Singh, 2010), personal involvement in corporate citizenship behaviors (Glavis & Piderit, 2009), and the connection of an employee's work to overall organizational goals (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) are addressed in the literature. Work by European researchers Schaufeli and Maslach suggest that variables such as vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work are all individual antecedents to the development of employee engagement. These variables are operationalized in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS; Maslach & Leiter, 1997) as the opposite state of burnout, another individual-level variable with its own set of individual antecedents (e.g., exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness; Maslach & Leiter, 1997) and the Utrecht Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Other work by Shagra (2007) and Shirom (2007) suggested a relationship between vigor (i.e., engagement; Maslach et al., 2001) and the openness and extroversion factors of the Big Five personality variables (Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness). The same research team reported that *Openness* predicted engagement and that *Extroversion* predicted levels of engagement at different points in time.

Other work around individual antecedents is conceptual, adding significant thought to the conversation, but little in terms of evidence-related antecedents. For example, in their conceptual model, Macey and Schneider (2008) suggested that a proactive personality, autotelic personality, conscientiousness, and trait positive affect led to

the development of employee engagement as individual-level antecedents. This framework, based in Maslach et al.'s (2001) belief that an employee's perception of their work environment would lead to organizational outcomes (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach et al., 2001), suggested salient cues of a person's personality could be a determining factor in the development of employee engagement. Others have followed, suggesting that stress, family and work status, emotional connection, and a readiness to direct personal energies are all related to the development of employee engagement although these connections are not yet empirically driven and are ripe for research.

In addition, several workplace antecedent models have suggested that individual antecedent variables such as curiosity (Reio, & Callahan, 2004; Reio, Petrosko, Wiswell, & Thongsukmag, 2006), optimism, self-efficacy (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006), self-esteem, perceptions of the self, and coping style (Rothmann & Storm, 2003; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, Schaufeli, 2007), all play a part in the development of work-oriented variables at the individual level. Although no specific research has explored these connections and engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2008), research has demonstrated a link between personality characteristics like those mentioned above and well-researched organizational variables such as job satisfaction, commitment, and job involvement (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004).

Organizational Antecedents

Organizations are complex, often complicated mazes for employees to navigate. However, when it comes to employee engagement, antecedents that drive the development of engagement at the organizational level revolve around basic employee/human needs. The identification of meeting basic needs reflects a lack of complexity, yet highlights the difficulty of actually creating organizational conditions for engagement to occur. This may resonate for anyone who has tried to intrinsically motivate work teams comprised of varying personalities and perceptions on an organizational level.

Empirically, the role of managers has been explored in extant, most notably from research using the satisfaction-engagement approach (Shuck, 2011). For example, research has propagated the role of manager self-efficacy (Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007), the role of the manager in creating a supportive climate (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Plakhotnik, Rocco, & Roberts, 2011), execution of mission and vision on a local level (Fleming & Asplund, 2007), and the role and perception of manager expectations (Bezuijen, Berg, Dam, & Thierry, 2009). Research has also suggested that managers with a nondefensive approach (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011) effect the development of engagement positively. Moreover, the role of culture, both organizational culture and local microcultures, have been examined as an antecedent variable (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Shuck, Reio, et al., 2011). Furthermore, research has suggested that workplace climates that are supportive, authentic, and positive all work to enhance the conditions of engagement. Supportive, emotionally positive workplace climates (Dollard & Bakker, 2010) have been operationalized to include the perception of supportive management, role clarity for in-role tasks, ability to contribute to organizational success,

recognition, ability to self-express, and appropriate levels of job challenge and control (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Culture, as an organizational variable, is often a force outside of the employee's direct control but often within a leader or manager's sphere of influence, suggesting a conceptual link between leader behavior and engagement (Shuck & Herd, 2011). Moreover, a leadership team's conscious choice to focus on increasing engagement is thought to be a positive antecedent to the development of engagement; a kind of workplace self-fulfilling prophecy effect. Last, organizational initiatives such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs that involve employee volunteerism and service work have been examined as an empirically driven antecedent (Davies & Crane, 2010; Lindorff & Peck, J., 2010).

Conceptually, emerging cross-cultural literature has suggested that hygiene factors extrinsic to the employee drive potential conditions for engagement at the organizational level (Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008; Shuck, Rocco, et al., 2011). Hygiene factors are operationalized as including fair pay, reasonable working conditions, a reasonable degree of security, and low levels of trust with the leader (Herzberg, 1959, 1968). When hygiene factors are not met, (i.e., employees believe they are not being paid fairly, they do not believe they have reasonable working conditions, or they do not feel a reasonable degree of job security) engagement is not likely to develop. Research around setting clear expectations, providing resources, and job control support this idea (Harter et al., 2002).

Moreover, some authors suggest that opportunities for learning (Czarnowsky, 2008) and talent management systems (Hughes & Rog, 2008) that involve employee and organizational development initiatives are antecedents to engagement. Unfortunately, no empirical research could be identified that focused specifically on the role of human resource development, organizational development, and human resource management practices as antecedents to the development of employee engagement, although it is a highly suggested antecedent.

As a final note, rewards such as pay-for-performance and monetary incentives have been explored in the literature and linked somewhat to discussions of hygiene and issues of justice and fair pay. Moreover, intrinsic motivations that come from external sources of feedback in the form of sincere recognition and encouragement on the job have been conceptually linked as antecedents to engagement, but no empirical evidence exists on the linkage. Some evidence does suggest that poorly appropriated monetary structures can undermine organizational engagement efforts (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010; Sparrow & Balain, 2010).

Summary of Antecedents

Varying types and levels of antecedents have been explored and examined with the concept of employee engagement, some empirical and others conceptual. What is clear from this review is that antecedents are not process dependent, but rather functions that usher in the conditions for the state of engagement to develop. Different organizations will come to create an employee engagement culture in different ways, using different

strategies and methods that are unique to their organization. In no literature did a one-process model fit across all antecedents or strategies. Furthermore, it is also clear that antecedents related to each organization must be in place, but processes to facilitate the development of an engagement culture are also in play. A detailed discussion of the processes for the development of employee engagement is however outside the primary research question used to guide this review and is suggested for further research and scholarly inquiry.

Implications for HRD: Research and Practice

The data in Figure 1 was used to address the primary research question guiding this study and can be used by HRD scholars and practitioners to inform the study and development of employee engagement. The 42 antecedents identified were not easily categorized, and only 24 of them have been empirically researched. The research implications are apparent from the data, while the implications for practice are more complex. The following sections explore both in brief. First, implications for HRD research will be explored, followed by implications for HRD practice.

Implications for HRD Research

The implications for research are clear. Every one of the 42 identified antecedents must be empirically tested and its relationship to employee engagement clearly demonstrated across multiple settings, organizations, and industries; a lofty yet necessary goal if the construct is to gain momentum as a serious tool in the field of human resources. Individual psychological factors of engaged and disengaged employees is one area that has shown some promise in the research, suggesting that employees who are capable of finding motivation within their job and organization, and who focus and direct their energies toward positive organizational outcomes, may be most likely to be engaged. For example, we wonder, “Is it possible to hire people who are predisposed to being engaged?” “How would an organization test or screen for such individuals and what are the ethics involved with these types of scenarios?” Moreover, it might be interesting for scholars to empirically examine different facets of engagement (e.g., cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) and their antecedents as well as the intention framework proposed by Nimon et al. (2011). To date, we could not find empirical work that specifically looked at facets of engagement and antecedents, although conceptual work is available (see, for example, Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Of particular importance for HRD research is the need to conduct comprehensive studies of highly engaged and disengaged workplaces. Beginning with comprehensive studies of individual units, managers, and teams, and progressing throughout entire global enterprises, it is essential to look at good practices and to tease out the many factors that effect engagement across broad categories. This can only be accomplished through serious, rigorous research. There are myriad opportunities to study a broad range of settings and to determine whether engagement is more likely to endure in

particular types of enterprises. Cross-cultural research that examines antecedents in culturally sensitive contexts could also be of benefit to multinationals and inform policy development at the public and private levels.

Still further, the relationship between employee engagement and organizational change has shown a negative relationship between organizational change cynicism and engagement (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). Further research might consider if highly engaged organizations handle change more effectively or what effect change has on the engagement process. The individual antecedents further suggest that involvement in meaningful work, corporate citizenship behaviors, links between individual and organizational goals, readiness for change, and perceived organizational support might also be related to the success of change efforts in engaged workgroups.

The shortage of literature on engagement in the major HRD journals is unfortunate, and may be why many of the organizational antecedents of engagement that are most under the influence of HRD scholars and practitioners have yet to be studied. These include feedback, job control, opportunities for learning, mission, and goal development. Many organizations report using a variety of assessment tools to determine engagement levels, yet little is known about how these evaluations are used, and worse, what training and development resources can be used to improve management skills that are shown to be lacking. The practical application of research must be developed further.

This literature review has applied the dichotomous lens of individual versus organizational antecedents, suggesting that they are separate categories to consider, but this division is only proposed for inquiry. Further research should focus on the natural-seeming links between what organizations do and what individuals contribute, how they overlap, and what leverage points emerge. For example, the organizational aspect of creating a supportive organizational culture is certainly linked to perceived organizational support. Understanding the dynamics of what organizations consider supportive versus what individuals perceive as support could be key to enhancing the way organizations communicate to their employees. We might ask, "Is it true that successful organizational environments are natural states of being where employees gravitate naturally and give more of themselves?" "Can employees detect inauthentic and artificially developed motivational environments and consequently undermine engagement efforts?"

Last, the most urgent implication for HRD research and scholarship is that as a field, we are not yet in the conversation and are being quickly left behind. While HRD practitioners have often been asked to create strategies for developing engagement, the HRD literature has offered them little assistance although literature from other areas of the academy are teeming (e.g., psychology, human resource management, and health care). From 1990 until 2008 there were 161 peer-reviewed articles with "employee engagement" in the citation or abstract. By December, 2010 there were 265, a 40% increase in just 2 years. This *Special Issue* is one effort to address the lack of theory development, research, or practitioner guidance in the HRD field.

Implications for HRD Practice

Even with the global economy in the doldrums and unemployment hovering near or above 10% in the United States, there is increased interest in employee engagement. We propose this might suggest that engagement is no longer a fad and that the concept is one HRD practitioners can be expected to address. Employee engagement has implications for all areas of HRD practice: *organization development, training and organizational learning, career development, performance management, and strategic change processes*.

The authors defined engagement earlier as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 103). To enhance organizational performance and development, organizations must continue to increase their leverage and the likelihood that employees who join or remain with the organization will direct their talents, skills, abilities, and motivation toward organizational goals. If employees are not directing their energies toward desired organizational outcomes then what are they directing their energies toward? Several implications for practice come from this.

The first implication is that HRD practitioners need knowledge. Thousands of articles, commentaries, and opinion pieces have been written by authors ranging from strategic communications professionals, idle consultants, academics, and international scholars. These opinion pieces may have a place; however, separating the facts and well-supported truths from sales pitches is one application of this article. Practitioners who learn to differentiate between practitioner ideas, well-wrapped sales pitches, and well-researched information will be far more effective in enhancing engagement within their organizations.

An earlier article by the authors of this article (Shuck & Wollard, 2010) discussed 10 seminal articles that formed the basis of the employee engagement concept; those articles can serve as a basis for knowledge and a first step for researchers. A bounty of research-based articles on engagement is available (see, for example, Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2008; Shuck, Reio, et al., 2011; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007); where to find them is a different question all together. One intent of this article is to offer practitioners a single source of information in one place regarding the range of engagement research and theory. This is an important contribution to bridging the gap between research and practice. Furthermore, organizing the concepts into individual and organizational antecedents enhances comprehension and may make it easier for practitioners to pick “quick wins” and build momentum for further action in their organizations. Awareness of the empirical basis of some antecedents may encourage practitioners to act, especially if their activities are expected to demonstrate return on investment.

Application of the information contained in Figure 1 might begin with an assessment by the practitioner within his or her own organization at the individual level (Shuck, Rocco, et al., 2011). Facilitating engagement is not a fixed prescription; it’s a plan unique to each organization, its culture, style, and objectives. We propose the following

Table 2. Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement Index

Considering your own level of engagement, reflect on and answer the following questions using your current work and workplace as a context.	Please elaborate on your answers in the space below.
1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaged are you? 2. Are you absorbed in your work? Do you find it meaningful? Why or why not? 3. Are you psychologically available to engage, or are there factors in your work or personal life that are inhibiting you? Can you name the factors? 4. Do your employee, work and/or family statuses support your engagement? How and why? 5. Do you have good work/life balance and what can be done to improve it? 6. Are you dedicated? Motivated? Curious? Optimistic? Vigorous? Do these words describe you? 7. Is there good “emotional fit” between you and the work you do? Does the work you do fit your coping and learning styles or are you often stressed, bored, or burned out? Why? 8. Do you feel you have choice and control over your work? Is there anything that could be done to improve your control? 9. Do you feel that your organization supports your success or impedes your progress? How? 10. Are you a good corporate citizen? Is your employer a good corporate citizen? How do you define citizen? 11. Is there a link between your goals and the organization’s goals? 12. Are you willing to invest your personal energies to reach your organization’s goals? Why or why not?	

list of questions not as an exhaustive list, but rather a starting point for the individual to consider antecedents to their own level of engagement. We contend this list could be used as an assessment tool for organizations to begin to developing footholds within the engagement conversation; this list of questions is not designed to be scientific, but rather proposed as a tool for developing community, conversation, and for creating the space for productive, progressive dialogue. See Table 2. Some organizations may need to adapt the questions to make them less formal; practitioners can modify them to suit their circumstances.

Exploring how employees respond to these questions and how well individual antecedents inform and even predict levels of engagement could be a useful beginning. However, more research is needed (Christian et al., 2011); this list is meant only as a starting point. For example, which antecedents are most powerfully supporting engagement or various facets of engagement? Which detract? How volatile is the swing from

Table 3. Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement Index

Considering how your organization operates on a daily basis, reflect on and answer the following questions.	Please elaborate on your answers in this space.
1. Is the mission and vision clear to our employees? Is the corporate culture authentic? In our organization, what do the words “authentic” and “culture” mean? 2. Is our organization socially responsible and can our employees participate? Can we name how? 3. Are managers clear about what they expect from employees; are employees clear about what they expect from their managers? 4. Is encouragement common? Do employees receive timely feedback? 5. Are pay, rewards, benefits, and working conditions considered reasonable? How can they be better? 6. How much control do people have over their jobs? Can we realistically empower them more? How? 7. How is our leadership viewed? 8. How challenged do people feel? How do we know this? 9. Are there opportunities for learning or are there barriers to learning processes in our organization? What can we do to provide equal access? 10. Is our workplace seen as safe physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially? What tells us it is unsafe, or safe? 11. Is the workplace climate positive and what artifacts reflect this? 12. Is there a focus on talent management and using people’s strengths, or just using people? 13. Is the culture supportive? How and why?	

fully engaged to fully disengaged and what are we (as an organization) willing to do about it for our employees? Do antecedents vary by industry, organizational level, and personality? These and many other questions remain ripe for research and will help practitioners more easily zero in on high potential returns.

The second implication and challenge is to use antecedents to consider the strengths of an organization; a kind of appreciative inquiry approach (Hart, Conklin, & Allen, 2008) to developing engagement. The items below have all been indicated as important to the likelihood of engagement occurring in an organization. Consider the organizational antecedents items in Figure 1 as a list reconfigured as an organizational checklist, a kind of *Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement Index*, mixing research and practice in a way that is practical and easy to apply (see Table 3).

Aside from this *Index*, simply focusing on what the organization does well, and the people who seem to do well within the culture, can be a great first step toward enhancing engagement (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). Practitioners should realize that even small efforts to focus on recognizing what the organization does well can have a positive outcome on engagement. There is always some fluctuation in engagement and performance over time (Evans & Redfern, 2010), so any snapshot or survey will show variation; we suspect this ebb and flow is natural and a function of the effort and rest required for extended periods of high-energy exertion. This is a simple application to help determine what strategies make sense in enhancing individual and organizational readiness for engagement and offered only as a first step; we hope other researchers will contribute to the emerging conversation and continue the refinement of the both *Indexes*. Strategists and stakeholders in organizations have to decide what makes sense to leverage given their situation and what next steps could be. The possibilities though, seem exciting.

Finally, we propose that engagement is a specialized and customized occurrence, occurring at fleeting moments of time that can prove challenging to capture quantitatively or qualitatively. As more organizations survey employees and work to enhance engagement, the reality of which factors are common to most organizations and which are unique will become more apparent; this we suggest, represents the next chapters to be written.

Concluding Thoughts

The potential of a fully engaged workforce would be tremendous. Consider the benefits of raising engagement levels inside organizations by only 5% or 10%; the implications could be enormous for an organizational life cycle and the overall well-being for the workforce. Notwithstanding, the unique characteristics of engaged organizations should be carefully studied in an effort to tease out the inputs, processes, and outputs that are common to all organizations and those that have proven effective in specific cases. Ultimately it is a blend of general and specific strategies that will create an effective engagement culture. We suspect the emergence of research examining the more distal and salient cues around employee engagement will flourish. Certainly, the field is wide open for dialogue and constructive conversation.

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