

Building Sustainable Employee Engagement in the EPC Industry: The Role of Career Development, Organizational Justice, and Perceived Organizational Support

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Sustainable Engagement, Career Development, Organizational Justice, Perceived Organizational Support, Social Exchange Theory

Received : 20, June

Revised : 22, July

Accepted: 20, August

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of career development and organizational justice on sustainable employee engagement, with perceived organizational support (POS) as a mediating variable. Using Social Exchange Theory, the research tested a structural model based on data from 149 permanent employees of PT Enviromate Technology International (ETI), collected via questionnaire during 2025. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS. Results show that career development directly and indirectly enhances sustainable engagement via POS, while organizational justice only exerts an indirect effect through POS. The findings highlight the strategic importance of POS in fostering long-term engagement and offer theoretical insights into HR practices within the EPC sector.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced and uncertain business environment, organizations increasingly recognize that their long-term success depends not only on financial capital or technology, but also—perhaps more critically—on the sustained engagement of their people. Employees are no longer seen merely as resources to execute tasks, but as partners in shaping the future of the organization. This shift has led to growing attention on sustainable engagement, a deeper and more enduring form of engagement that combines emotional commitment, mental resilience, and consistent contribution over time. Especially in industries like Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC), where work is often project-based and highly demanding, sustaining engagement is both a challenge and a strategic necessity (Mathis & Jackson, 2019; Kusi et al., 2021).

Despite its growing importance, many organizations still face difficulties in maintaining high levels of engagement. PT Enviromate Technology International (ETI), an EPC company in Indonesia, has seen a steady rise in employee turnover, from 7.9% in 2021 to 11.7% in 2023. Most of these resignations were voluntary. Based on exit interviews, the top reason for leaving was limited opportunities for career development (39%), followed by dissatisfaction with compensation (26%). A pre-survey also revealed that only 30% of employees felt they had a clear career path, and just 25% believed the organization applied policies fairly. These figures reflect deeper challenges in how the organization supports growth and fairness, both of which are essential for fostering sustainable engagement.

Career development offers employees a sense of direction, purpose, and a future within the company. It creates space for growth and encourages people to invest their energy and loyalty into their work (Idrus et al., 2023; Simon et al., 2021). Organizational justice, on the other hand, builds trust. When people perceive fairness in how decisions are made and how they are treated, they are more likely to feel respected and motivated to contribute meaningfully (Istiqomah et al., 2021; Sharma & Kumra, 2022). However, research has shown that the effects of these factors on engagement are not always direct or consistent. This raises an important question: what makes career development and justice truly translate into sustained engagement?

One answer lies in the concept of Perceived Organizational Support (POS). POS captures how employees interpret the organization's care and appreciation for their contributions. It is not only about formal policies, but also about the felt sense of support. When employees feel supported, they are more likely to be engaged, resilient, and committed to their roles (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022). Yet, previous studies have found mixed results regarding the role of POS, suggesting that more research is needed—especially in contexts like the EPC industry, where work environments are unique and often high-pressure (Wahyuni, 2019; Eviana, 2024).

To address these gaps, this study examines the extent to which career development and organizational justice influence sustainable employee engagement, with perceived organizational support acting as a mediating variable. Specifically, this research explores how career development and

organizational justice affect perceived organizational support and sustainable engagement, whether career development and justice significantly enhance employees' perceptions of support, and how perceived organizational support contributes to sustainable engagement. Furthermore, the study investigates whether perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between career development and sustainable engagement, as well as the relationship between organizational justice and sustainable engagement. Through this integrative inquiry, the study aims to offer both theoretical enrichment and practical insights into fostering enduring employee engagement within the EPC industry.

Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, this research develops an integrative model to explain both the direct and indirect effects of career development and organizational justice on sustainable engagement. By focusing on the dynamics of exchange, trust, and reciprocal investment, the study contributes to a better understanding of sustainable human resource practices and offers practical insights for EPC organizations seeking to retain and empower a committed workforce.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory as a Theoretical Foundation

Social Exchange Theory (SET), originally introduced by Homans (1958) and further developed by Blau (1964), provides the theoretical underpinning for this study. The theory asserts that social behavior is the result of an exchange process, where individuals seek to maximize benefits while minimizing costs. In organizational contexts, SET explains why employees reciprocate favorable organizational treatment—such as fairness or developmental support—with loyalty, engagement, and performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This reciprocal process is anchored in the perceived balance of benefit and obligation.

SET also emphasizes the role of trust, mutual dependence, and relational norms in sustaining long-term interactions, making it especially relevant in high-demand environments like the EPC industry. Particularly relevant is the role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as the cognitive-emotional interpretation of these exchanges. POS represents the extent to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and supports their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In this research, SET frames the relationships between Career Development (X1) and Organizational Justice (X2) with Sustainable Engagement (Y), with POS functioning as a mediating construct that reflects employees' interpretation of organizational care and reciprocity.

Sustainable Engagement and Its Multidimensional Framework

Sustainable Engagement (SE) is defined as the consistent, meaningful, and long-term involvement of employees in their work, aligning individual energy with organizational sustainability goals. Rooted in Kahn (1990) concept of personal engagement—where employees physically, emotionally, and cognitively immerse themselves in their roles—SE was further conceptualized by Ogueyungbo et al. (2022) into three core dimensions: Affective Engagement,

which refers to emotional connection, enthusiasm, and sense of purpose in one's work (Jiatong et al., 2022); Behavioral Engagement, which reflects discretionary effort, initiative-taking, and persistence beyond formal job requirements (Ogueyungbo et al., 2022); Cognitive Engagement, which involves psychological presence, creativity, and deep mental focus in problem-solving (Gürbüz et al., 2023; Saks, 2019).

Unlike temporary motivation or task compliance, SE reflects a deeper investment in work that is sustainable over time. It is a strategic construct that bridges employee well-being with organizational adaptability, often fostered through managerial fairness, developmental support, and perceived care. Thus, identifying its antecedents—such as CD, OJ, and POS—becomes critical for ensuring long-term organizational performance.

Career Development and Its Role in Employee Sustainability

Career Development (CD) refers to structured organizational efforts to promote employee growth through skill enhancement, promotion pathways, and continuous performance improvement. As defined by Busro (in Sinaga et al., 2022), CD encompasses three dimensions: career provision (e.g., opportunity clarity), self-improvement (e.g., training and education), and quality enhancement (e.g., discipline and motivation).

Within the SET framework, CD acts as a valuable organizational input. Employees who perceive tangible career support often interpret it as a sign of respect and investment, prompting them to respond with sustained engagement. Prior research confirms that structured career advancement enhances commitment and motivation, particularly when aligned with personal aspirations (Jena & Nayak, 2023; Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022).

Building on these perspectives, CD contributes not only to individual development but also to the organization's long-term talent sustainability. Rachman & Iqbal (2025) found that well-structured development opportunities enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover intention. Likewise, Haliansyah et al. (2024) confirmed that career development significantly strengthens employee commitment when aligned with personal growth needs. Such findings reinforce the notion that CD is a strategic resource, capable of generating reciprocal commitment and sustainable engagement, particularly in dynamic project-based environments like EPC firms.

H1: Career Development has a significant positive effect on Sustainable Engagement.

Organizational Justice as a Driver of Long-Term Engagement

Organizational Justice (OJ) refers to employees' perception of fairness within the organization. It comprises four dimensions as proposed by Colquitt et al. (2019): distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of processes), interpersonal justice (respect and dignity), and informational justice (transparency and adequacy of communication).

Fair treatment signals ethical conduct and promotes psychological safety, which encourages emotional attachment and long-term commitment. In SET terms, justice is a social currency that organizations offer, which employees reciprocate through proactive behavior, loyalty, and cognitive involvement

(Pakpahan et al., 2020; Na'imah et al., 2022). When employees feel fairly treated, they are more likely to engage beyond minimum requirements.

Extending this perspective, empirical studies highlight the direct and indirect roles of OJ in fostering employee engagement. Aggarwal et al. (2022) found that distributive and procedural justice enhance engagement and reduce turnover intentions. Deepa (2020) highlighted that all justice dimensions positively affect emotional, cognitive, and physical engagement. Similarly, Mubashar et al. (2022) showed that organizational justice fosters engagement through organizational trust. These findings suggest that fair treatment, transparent communication, and respectful interactions are essential in promoting sustained engagement, especially in industries where employees often operate under high demands.

H2: Organizational Justice has a significant positive effect on Sustainable Engagement.

Perceived Organizational Support as a Mediating Construct

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) refers to employees' belief that the organization values their contributions and genuinely cares for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In this study, POS is conceptualized through three dimensions: supervisor support, job conditions and rewards, and organizational fairness (Azizah & Rokhman, 2021). These dimensions capture both instrumental and emotional aspects of support, forming a strong psychological climate that fosters reciprocal behavior.

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), POS functions as a key interpretive mechanism that transforms organizational actions into individual outcomes. When employees receive signals of support—through fair treatment and developmental opportunities—they internalize these actions as trust-building gestures and respond with higher engagement (Sun, 2019; Alshaabani et al., 2021). Thus, POS is not only a product of favorable organizational practices but also a driver of positive employee attitudes and behaviors.

Career Development (CD) and Organizational Justice (OJ) both play essential roles in shaping POS. Developmental opportunities such as training, career planning, and personal improvement initiatives signal organizational investment in employee growth (Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022), while fair treatment across outcomes, processes, and interpersonal interactions signals respect and dignity (Colquitt et al., 2019). When such conditions are perceived, employees internalize them as organizational support, resulting in stronger emotional bonds and commitment.

Building on this perspective, multiple studies affirm that POS is a key mechanism through which CD and OJ translate into engagement. Jia-jun & Hua-ming (2022) found that career growth, when supported by POS, strengthens affective commitment and engagement. Similarly, Aggarwal et al. (2022) and Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated that distributive and procedural justice significantly predict POS, fostering trust and emotional security. Imran et al. (2020) further highlighted that POS enhances sustainable engagement through psychological states like thriving and flourishing. These findings establish POS

as a central mediating mechanism in translating developmental and fairness-based practices into long-term engagement.

H3: Career Development has a significant positive effect on Perceived Organizational Support.

H4: Organizational Justice has a significant positive effect on Perceived Organizational Support.

H5: Perceived Organizational Support has a significant positive effect on Sustainable Engagement.

H6: Perceived Organizational Support mediates the relationship between Career Development and Sustainable Engagement.

H7: Perceived Organizational Support mediates the relationship between Organizational Justice and Sustainable Engagement.

The following is the framework of this research:

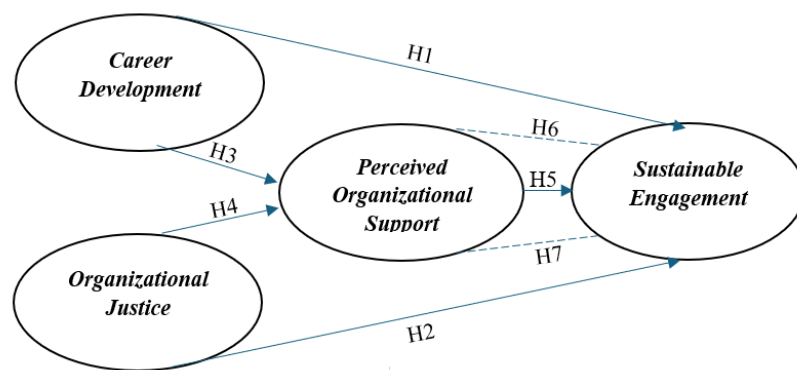


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal explanatory design to examine the relationships between the independent variables (Career Development and Organizational Justice), the dependent variable (Sustainable Engagement), and the mediating variable (Perceived Organizational Support). The research was conducted at PT Enviromate Technology International (ETI), involving a population of 229 permanent employees with a minimum tenure of three years. The minimum sample size was determined using the Slovin formula (error tolerance = 5%), resulting in 146 respondents, and a total of 149 valid responses were collected. A convenience sampling technique was used (due to the voluntary nature of participation), with questionnaires distributed both online (Google Forms) and offline (printed forms) through coordination with company representatives. Data collection was carried out using a structured self-administered questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Each research variable was measured using established indicators from previous literature. Career Development (CD) was assessed through career provision, self-improvement, and work quality. Organizational Justice (OJ) was measured across distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational dimensions. Sustainable Engagement (SE) was assessed based on affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, while Perceived Organizational Support (POS) included indicators of supervisor support, fairness, and reward conditions.

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares technique (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS software. The analytical procedure involved evaluating the measurement model (validity, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity), assessing the structural model (R-square, Q-square, effect sizes, and path coefficients), and testing hypotheses through a bootstrapping procedure (generating t-statistics and p-values to evaluate significance). The Sobel test was additionally applied to examine the significance of POS as a mediating variable.

RESULTS

This section presents the sequence of statistical analyses conducted to validate the research model and test the proposed hypotheses. The analysis was performed using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method via SmartPLS software. The testing process followed a two-step approach: (1) evaluation of the measurement model to assess reliability and validity, and (2) evaluation of the structural model to test the relationships among constructs. In addition, a higher-order construct analysis was employed to understand the contribution of each dimension within the latent variables.

Measurement Model

Indicator Reliability and Convergent Validity

To evaluate convergent validity, the outer loadings of each indicator were examined. Only items with loadings ≥ 0.70 were retained, while those below the threshold were further reviewed based on their conceptual relevance and empirical contribution. After considering AVE, cross-loading, and model fit indices, a total of 4 indicators were removed because they did not provide optimal contribution to construct reliability and validity. The final configuration demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (α), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the minimum thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2022), confirming high internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Career Development (CD)	0.877	0.902	0.535
Organizational Justice (OJ)	0.931	0.940	0.590
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	0.885	0.910	0.560
Sustainable Engagement (SE)	0.936	0.946	0.614

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loadings, and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its inter-construct correlations, and each item loaded highest on its intended construct. HTMT values were all below the 0.90 threshold, validating the uniqueness of each construct.

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios

Constructs	CD	OJ	POS	SE
CD	—	—	—	—
OJ	0.679	—	—	—
POS	0.741	0.780	—	—
SE	0.671	0.537	0.707	—

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was assessed by evaluating the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and model fit. The R^2 value for Perceived Organizational Support (POS) was 0.601, indicating that Career Development and Organizational Justice jointly explained 60.1 percent of the variance in POS. Similarly, the R^2 value for Sustainable Engagement (SE) was 0.505, suggesting that the predictors accounted for just over half of the variance in SE. These findings reflect that the proposed model has moderate explanatory power and that the key antecedents are meaningfully related to the outcome variables.

The f^2 values further revealed the strength of each predictor. Organizational Justice had a large effect on POS ($f^2 = 0.402$), highlighting its dominant role in shaping perceptions of organizational support. Career Development showed moderate effects on both POS ($f^2 = 0.181$) and SE ($f^2 = 0.145$), indicating that structured career opportunities and development practices play an influential role in enhancing engagement and perceived support. POS itself had a small but notable effect on SE ($f^2 = 0.129$), while the direct influence of Organizational Justice on SE was negligible ($f^2 = 0.000$), suggesting that its contribution to engagement operates primarily through POS.

To test predictive relevance, the blindfolding procedure yielded Q^2 values of 0.329 for POS and 0.296 for SE, both of which are above zero and therefore indicate acceptable predictive accuracy. Additionally, the model's Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.091, which, although slightly above the ideal threshold of 0.08, remains within the maximum acceptable limit of 0.10. This confirms that the model achieves an adequate fit for exploratory research purposes. Overall, these results indicate that the model performs satisfactorily in explaining and predicting the structural relationships among the constructs, thereby supporting its applicability in the organizational context under study.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses were tested using a bootstrapping technique. Results confirmed that Career Development significantly influenced both POS and SE directly, and also indirectly through POS. Similarly, Organizational Justice had a strong direct effect on POS but no direct effect on SE; however, its indirect influence through POS was significant.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	CD → SE	0.344	4.052	0.000	Supported
H2	OJ → SE	0.014	0.153	0.879	Not Supported
H3	CD → POS	0.357	4.428	0.000	Supported
H4	OJ → POS	0.490	6.255	0.000	Supported

H5	POS → SE	0.424	4.725	0.000	Supported
Indirect					
H6	CD → POS → SE	0.152	2.956	0.003	Supported
H7	OJ → POS → SE	0.208	3.826	0.000	Supported

Higher-Order Construct Analysis

To better understand the structural composition of each latent variable, a second-order analysis was conducted. Given the multidimensional nature of the core latent variables, this step aimed to explore which dimensions contributed most significantly to each construct. The second-order constructs were estimated using the repeated indicator approach with Mode A, which assumes a reflective-reflective relationship between the higher-order construct and its dimensions. This approach was selected for its simplicity and compatibility with the measurement model design and is widely supported for reflective-reflective hierarchies where lower-order constructs are conceptually interchangeable and empirically reliable (Becker et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2022). While this method is well-established, results are interpreted with appropriate caution and used primarily for exploratory purposes, particularly given the potential conceptual variation across dimensions. For Career Development, Career Provision was the strongest contributor ($\beta = 0.890$), followed by Self-Improvement ($\beta = 0.843$) and Work Quality Enhancement ($\beta = 0.805$), highlighting the importance of clear career paths and continuous capability development. In Organizational Justice, Procedural Justice led significantly ($\beta = 0.911$), emphasizing fair and transparent processes, supported by Informational Justice ($\beta = 0.887$), Distributive Justice ($\beta = 0.877$), and Interpersonal Justice ($\beta = 0.867$). Perceived Organizational Support was dominated by Supervisor Support ($\beta = 0.934$), indicating that leadership behavior strongly shapes employees' perceptions of support, followed by Rewards & Job Conditions ($\beta = 0.914$) and Fairness ($\beta = 0.808$). Lastly, Sustainable Engagement was most influenced by Affective Engagement ($\beta = 0.951$), underscoring that emotional connection is central to long-term commitment, followed by Cognitive Engagement ($\beta = 0.939$) and Behavioral Engagement ($\beta = 0.931$).

DISCUSSION

Career Development and Sustainable Engagement

The first hypothesis (H1), which states that career development has a significant positive effect on sustainable engagement, is confirmed. In the context of PT Enviromate Technology International, employees who perceive clear career trajectories, fair advancement systems, and meaningful professional development are more likely to maintain a deep emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment to their work. This finding aligns with the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that when organizations invest in employees' growth, individuals reciprocate with heightened engagement. Prior studies by Ahmed et al. (2020) and Jena & Nayak (2023) similarly highlight that

structured and empowering career development enhances engagement by strengthening future orientation and psychological ownership at work.

From a practical standpoint, second-order analysis identifies career provision as the most influential dimension in shaping engagement, followed by self-improvement and work quality enhancement. These findings suggest that employees are especially motivated by transparent access to career paths, constructive performance feedback, and personalized learning opportunities. Organizations are encouraged to communicate promotion criteria clearly, provide development roadmaps, and embed feedback mechanisms that acknowledge both outcomes and effort. Doing so helps foster a climate of trust and optimism, enabling sustainable engagement among employees in high-pressure EPC environments.

Organizational Justice and Sustainable Engagement

The second hypothesis (H2), which proposes a direct positive relationship between organizational justice and sustainable engagement, is not supported by the findings. Although fairness is a fundamental element of a healthy organizational climate, in this study it does not directly predict sustained employee engagement. This is particularly relevant in the EPC sector, where structural justice alone may not be emotionally compelling enough to generate long-term commitment. As supported by Piotrowski et al. (2021) and Rahman & Karim (2022), procedural and distributive fairness may lay the groundwork for trust, but they require complementary support systems to translate into engagement.

Nevertheless, the managerial implications are vital. Procedural justice was identified as the most impactful dimension, followed closely by informational justice. These results underscore the importance of transparent decision-making processes, inclusive policy design, and respectful communication between leaders and team members. To create a culture where fairness is felt rather than merely observed, managers should foster participative forums, open channels for feedback, and consistent interpersonal treatment.

When fairness is perceived as genuine and human-centered, it enhances psychological safety, which is foundational for enabling other drivers of sustainable engagement.

The Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support

Hypotheses H3, H4, and H5 are all supported, demonstrating that perceived organizational support (POS) positively influences sustainable engagement and is shaped by both career development and organizational justice. Furthermore, hypotheses H6 and H7 are also confirmed, revealing that POS significantly mediates the relationships between career development and engagement, as well as between organizational justice and engagement. These findings confirm that sustainable engagement is not merely a result of structural or procedural inputs but is deeply rooted in employees' perceptions that the organization genuinely values and supports them.

This mediating role of POS reflects its dual nature as both an interpretive and emotional mechanism—a lens through which employees assess organizational intentions and a channel through which they experience relational

trust. Among its dimensions, supervisor support emerged as the dominant driver of POS, followed by rewards and job conditions, while fairness, although relatively less influential, remains a significant supporting dimension. This indicates that the interpersonal interface between leaders and employees is crucial in fostering a sense of organizational care. To strengthen POS, organizations should equip supervisors with empathetic communication skills, coaching capabilities, and relational leadership practices. Additionally, fair compensation systems and healthy work environments must be maintained and regularly reviewed. As highlighted by Suharto & Suprpto (2023), POS plays a strategic role in building resilience and psychological endurance, especially in project-intensive sectors like EPC, where engagement must be continuously renewed in the face of high demands and uncertainty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that career development has a direct and significant impact on sustainable engagement. When employees perceive structured career opportunities and support for growth, they are more likely to remain emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally engaged. Organizational justice, however, does not directly influence engagement, but significantly affects it through perceived organizational support (POS). POS plays a central mediating role, translating developmental and fair practices into long-term commitment. These findings emphasize that sustainable engagement relies not only on formal policies but also on how employees feel valued, supported, and understood in their daily experiences.

To enhance sustainable engagement, the company should prioritize clear and well-communicated career pathways, ensure transparent and fair evaluations, and offer training aligned with employee aspirations. Strengthening procedural justice and interpersonal respect, especially through empathetic supervisors, will boost POS. Regular reviews of compensation and working conditions are also necessary. Finally, promoting emotional and cognitive involvement, not just task completion, will help build a resilient, motivated workforce ready to support the company's long-term success.

FURTHER STUDY

This study offers valuable insights into employee engagement within an EPC firm, yet it also opens space for further exploration. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the study scope by involving multiple organizations or comparing different industrial sectors to enhance generalizability. Incorporating other relevant variables—such as transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, or employee well-being—could also enrich the current framework.

One limitation of this study lies in the methodological design, which primarily relied on cross-sectional survey data. While this approach provides a snapshot of the relationships among variables, it may not fully capture the dynamic nature of employee engagement over time. Future research is

encouraged to consider alternative designs, such as longitudinal studies or multi-wave data collection, to provide a more comprehensive representation of causal relationships.

Moreover, adopting longitudinal or qualitative methods would help capture changes in engagement over time and reveal deeper insights into employees lived experiences. Future studies might also investigate moderating factors such as tenure, job role, or organizational culture to understand under which conditions engagement mechanisms are effective. Finally, with the rise of hybrid and remote work environments, examining sustainable engagement in digital or flexible work settings would offer timely contributions to modern HR strategy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. M. Ali Iqbal, S.TP., M.Sc., for his invaluable guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback throughout the development of this paper. Appreciation is also extended to Universitas Mercu Buana, whose academic environment and support have played an essential role in this research journey. The author also wishes to thank the employees of PT Enviromate Technology International for their generous participation and valuable contributions to the study. Above all, heartfelt appreciation goes to the author's late father and beloved mother, whose love, prayers, and unwavering support have been the foundation of this academic journey.

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