

## Trend of Employee Engagement Research in Human Resource Management: A Content Analysis of Work-Life Balance and Leadership Studies

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received : 10 October 2025

Revised : 06 November 2025

Accepted : 10 January 2026

Available online : 31 January 2026

#### Keywords:

Employee Engagement, Work-Life Balance, Servant Leadership, Human Resource Management, Content Analysis.

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### ABSTRACT

Employee engagement has become a central concept in Human Resource Management (HRM) research due to its role in enhancing employee performance and organizational sustainability. This study employed a content analysis approach to review research trends related to employee engagement, particularly those examining work-life balance and leadership perspectives. A total of 50 peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2025 were analyzed based on research design, antecedent variables, organizational context, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches. The findings indicate a significant increase in employee engagement research in recent years, with quantitative cross-sectional designs dominating the literature. Work-life balance and servant leadership emerged as the most frequently examined antecedents of employee engagement, while employee performance remained the primary outcome variable. Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory was identified as the dominant theoretical framework. Based on the findings, this study proposes methodological and contextual recommendations for future employee engagement research.



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## INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become a central concern in contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM), particularly in response to rapid changes in work environments, digital transformation, and shifting employee expectations. Recent studies indicate that organizations increasingly view employee engagement as a critical factor influencing employee performance, retention, and organizational sustainability, especially in knowledge-driven and service-oriented industries ([Shrivastava & Mehta, 2025](#); [Rani et al., 2025](#); [Dutta, 2025](#)).

A growing body of empirical research has examined employee engagement in relation to work–life balance, leadership practices, and organizational support mechanisms. Numerous studies emphasize that employees' ability to balance professional and personal roles plays a crucial role in fostering engagement and enhancing job performance ([Siregar et al., 2022](#); [Chaniago & Rahmawati, 2024](#);

[Ahmed et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, leadership approaches, particularly servant leadership and ethical leadership, have been shown to strengthen employee engagement by promoting supportive and value-driven work environments ([Goyal et al., 2024](#); [Lim & Zawawi, 2024](#); [Okai et al., 2025](#)).

Recent research also highlights the increasing relevance of employee engagement in digital, hybrid, and flexible work settings. Studies focusing on the IT sector, creative industries, and multinational corporations suggest that flexible working arrangements, technological support, and adaptive HR strategies significantly shape engagement experiences, particularly among millennial and Generation Z employees ([Anandita et al., 2025](#); [Trifan & Pantea, 2024](#); [Setyawan & Sadana, 2025](#)). These findings indicate that employee engagement is no longer a static construct but is deeply embedded in evolving organizational and technological contexts.

Despite the expanding literature, existing studies on employee engagement remain fragmented in terms of research design, contextual focus, and theoretical positioning. While many studies concentrate on testing specific antecedents, such as work-life balance, rewards, or leadership styles, others adopt review-based or conceptual approaches without systematically mapping overarching research trends ([Chairunnisa et al., 2023](#); [Falasifa et al., 2025](#); [Rohmawan et al., 2025](#)). As a result, there is limited clarity regarding dominant methodological approaches, frequently examined variables, and underexplored contexts within the employee engagement literature.

To address this gap, the present study conducts a systematic content analysis of 50 peer-reviewed articles on employee engagement within HRM. Rather than evaluating effect sizes or testing hypotheses, this study aims to map research patterns related to publication trends, research designs, research subjects, organizational contexts, antecedent, mediator, and outcome variables, as well as data collection instruments and analytical methods. By providing a structured overview of how employee engagement research has been conducted, this review seeks to offer a clearer understanding of the current state of the literature and to identify promising directions for future research.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study employed a systematic content analysis approach to examine trends in employee engagement research within the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature. Content analysis was selected because it enables researchers to systematically classify, quantify, and interpret patterns in published studies based on predefined categories. This approach is particularly suitable for identifying research trends, dominant methodologies, and thematic emphases across a body of literature.

The design of this study follows the methodological structure commonly used in trend and mapping studies, where published articles are treated as units of analysis and coded according to specific analytical aspects. Accordingly, this study does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to provide a comprehensive overview of how

employee engagement research has evolved over time.

### Data Source

The data for this study consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on employee engagement, work-life balance, and leadership within the HRM domain. Articles were retrieved from internationally recognized academic databases. To ensure the relevance and quality of the reviewed literature, only articles published in reputable journals were considered.

The time span of the reviewed literature covered 2014 to 2025, reflecting the period during which employee engagement research experienced substantial growth. The search process yielded an initial pool of articles, which was subsequently refined through a screening process based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a content analysis guideline, adapted from previous trend and mapping studies. The guideline was developed to systematically code each article according to several analytical aspects. Prior to data analysis, all categories were clearly defined to minimize subjectivity and enhance reliability. The research instrument used in this study was a content analysis guideline consisting of several aspects and categories, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The Aspects and Categories used for Content Analysis in the Study

Aspects	Categories	
Types of research (A)	A.1 Quantitative Research A.2 Qualitative Research	A.3 Mixed-Methods Research A.4 Review / SLR
Types of quantitative research (B)	B.1 Survey (Cross-sectional) B.2 Longitudinal / Diary Study B.3 Experimental / Intervention Study	B.4 Quasi-Experimental Design B.5 Panel / Multilevel Design
Research subject (C)	C.1 Employees (general) C.2 Frontline service employees C.3 Professional / knowledge workers	C.4 Managers / supervisors C.5 Public sector employees
Organizational context (D)	D.1 Service organizations D.2 Hospitality and tourism D.3 Manufacturing organizations	D.4 Public sector organizations D.5 Professional service firms
Antecedent variables (E)	E.1 Work-life balance E.2 Servant leadership E.3 Job resources (general)	E.4 HRM practices E.5 Other leadership styles
Mediator variables (F)	F.1 Employee engagement F.2 Work engagement	F.3 Psychological well-being F.4 No mediator specified
Outcome variables (G)	G.1 Employee performance G.2 Innovative work behavior	G.3 Service performance G.4 Well-being / burnout
Data collection instruments (H)	H.1 Questionnaire survey H.2 Interview guide	H.4 Mixed instruments H.5 Unidentified

	H.3 Secondary data	
Data analysis methods (I)	I.1 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) I.2 Regression analysis I.3 Multilevel modeling I.4 Meta-analysis	I.5 Thematic analysis I.6 Descriptive statistics I.7 Others

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by classifying each article according to the predefined categories in the content analysis guideline. The frequency of each category was calculated to identify dominant patterns and trends in employee engagement research. The results were then presented in the form of frequency tables and graphical distributions.

The analysis focused on identifying trends in publication growth, dominant research designs, frequently examined antecedent variables, organizational contexts, and theoretical frameworks. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the coded data, while interpretative analysis was employed to explain emerging patterns.

All 50 articles included in this review were systematically coded and analyzed as the unit of analysis. However, only representative and conceptually relevant studies are explicitly cited in the Introduction and Discussion sections, while the remaining studies are reflected through the content analysis results and graphical distributions.

## FINDINGS

### Number of Publications

The number of article publications indicates how frequently employee engagement research has been conducted over a certain period. Examining publication trends is important because it reflects the level of scholarly attention devoted to a particular research topic and reveals how research interests evolve over time within the Human Resource Management field.

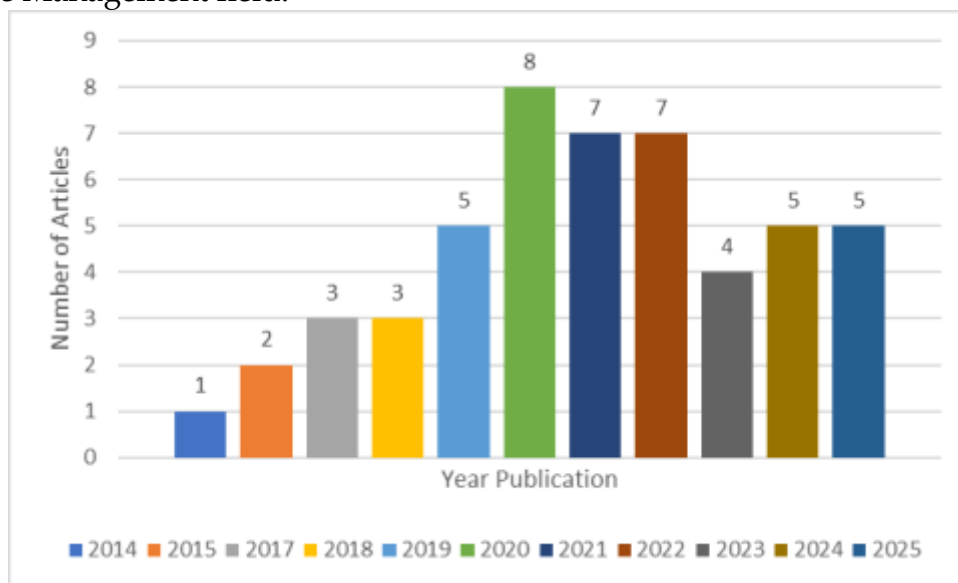
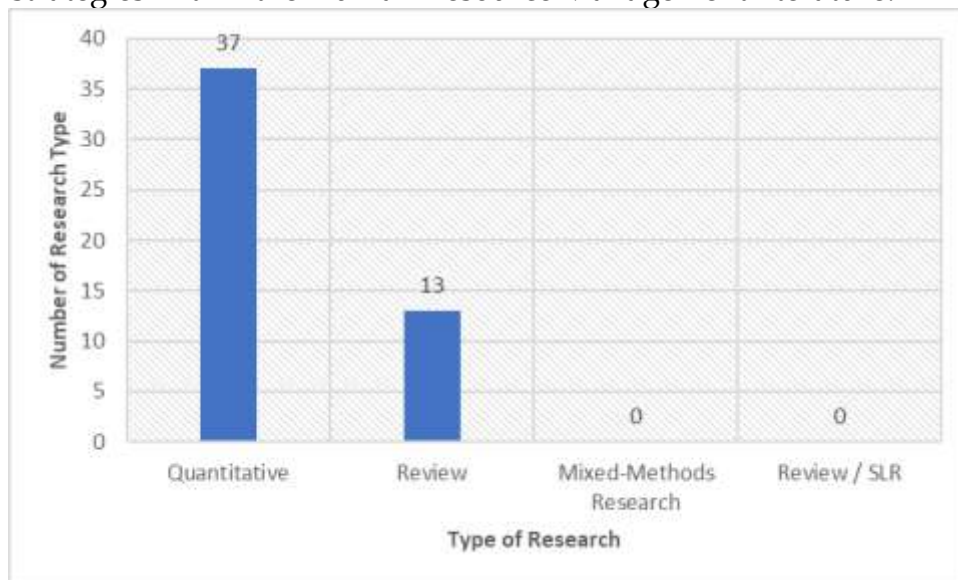


Figure 1. Number of Publications on Employee Engagement by Year

The number of publications indicates the intensity of research attention toward employee engagement over time. Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 1, studies on employee engagement began to appear consistently after 2014. Although no sharp fluctuation pattern is observed from year to year, a noticeable increase in publications occurred between 2019 and 2022. This upward trend suggests a growing scholarly interest in employee engagement as a central issue within Human Resource Management, particularly in response to changing work environments and increasing organizational demands.

### Type of Research

The type of research used in a study reflects the methodological orientation adopted by researchers in investigating a particular topic. Examining the distribution of research types is important to understand how employee engagement has been approached methodologically and to identify dominant and underrepresented research strategies within the Human Resource Management literature.



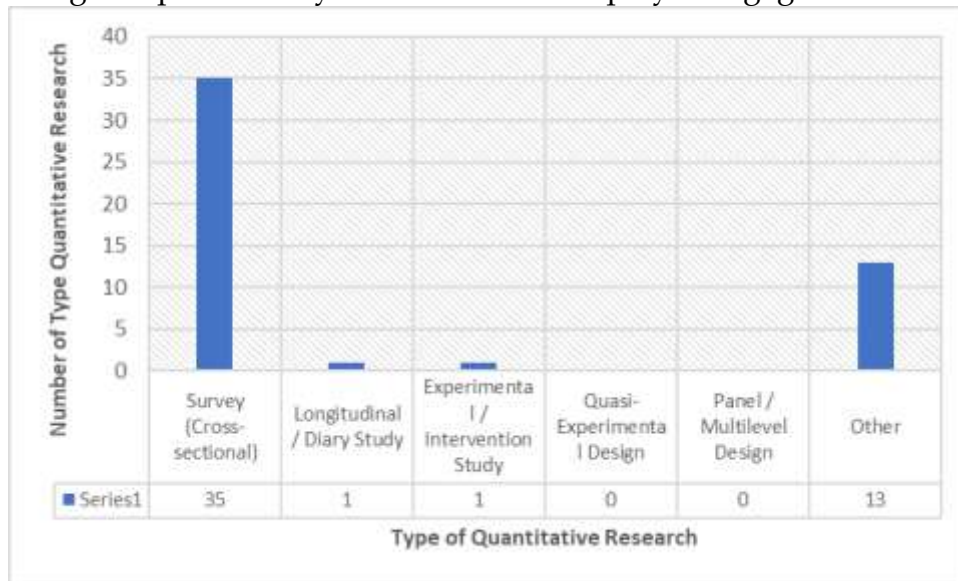
**Figure 2.** The Distribution of Research Types in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 2, quantitative research dominates employee engagement studies. Review-based studies, including systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses, also constitute a substantial portion of the literature. In contrast, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches are not represented. This distribution indicates that research on employee engagement primarily emphasizes empirical testing of theoretical models and synthesis of existing findings rather than exploratory or interpretive investigation.

### Types of Quantitative Research Designs

The types of quantitative research designs indicate how empirical investigations on employee engagement are methodologically structured. Examining the distribution

of quantitative research designs is important because it provides insight into how researchers collect and analyze empirical data and reveals the extent to which research designs capture the dynamic nature of employee engagement.

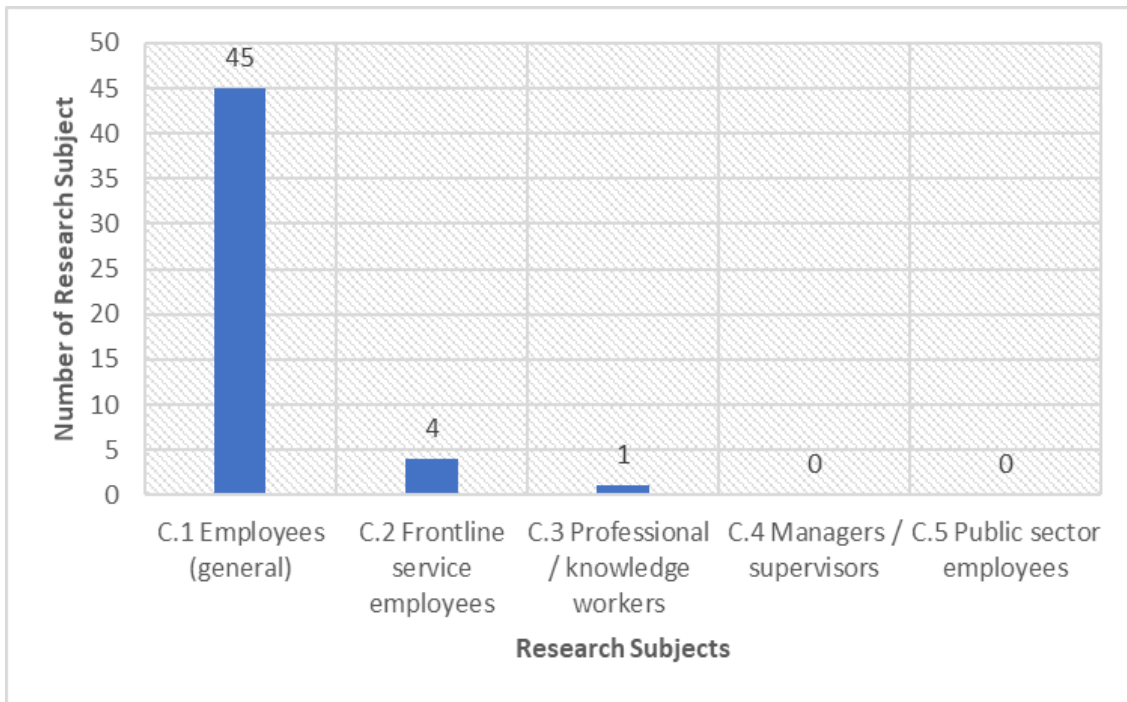


**Figure 3.** The Distribution of Quantitative Research Designs in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 3, survey-based cross-sectional designs dominate quantitative employee engagement studies. Longitudinal or diary studies, experimental or intervention-based designs, and panel or multilevel designs appear only in a limited number of studies. Notably, no quasi-experimental designs are identified among the reviewed articles. This distribution suggests that empirical research on employee engagement relies heavily on single-wave data collection, while designs capable of capturing changes over time or causal effects remain underutilized.

### Research Subjects

Research subjects represent the groups of individuals examined in empirical studies and indicate whose perspectives are predominantly emphasized within a research field. Analyzing research subjects is important because it provides insight into how employee engagement has been investigated across different employee groups and whether research attention is evenly distributed among various occupational categories.

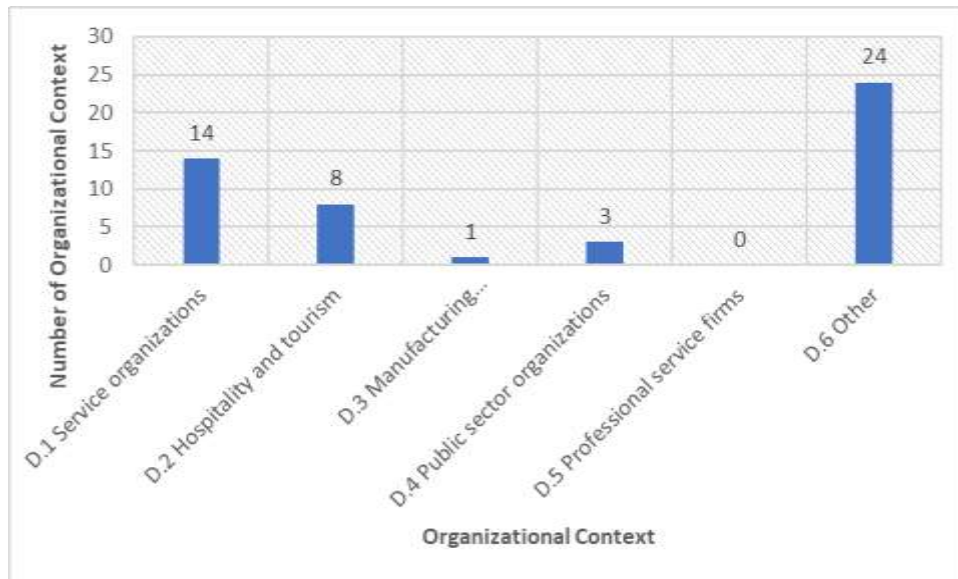


**Figure 4.** The Distribution of Research Subjects in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 4, the majority of employee engagement studies focus on employees in general organizational roles, accounting for 45 out of 50 studies. Only a small number of studies examine frontline service employees (4 studies), while professional or knowledge workers are represented in just one study. Notably, no studies explicitly focus on managers or supervisors or public sector employees as the primary research subjects. This distribution indicates a strong tendency to treat employees as a homogeneous group, with limited empirical attention given to role-specific or sector-specific engagement dynamics.

### Organizational Contexts

Organizational context refers to the type of organizational setting in which a study is conducted and provides important information about the environments where employee engagement is empirically examined. Analyzing organizational contexts is important because differences in sectoral characteristics, work demands, and organizational structures may influence how employee engagement is conceptualized and measured.

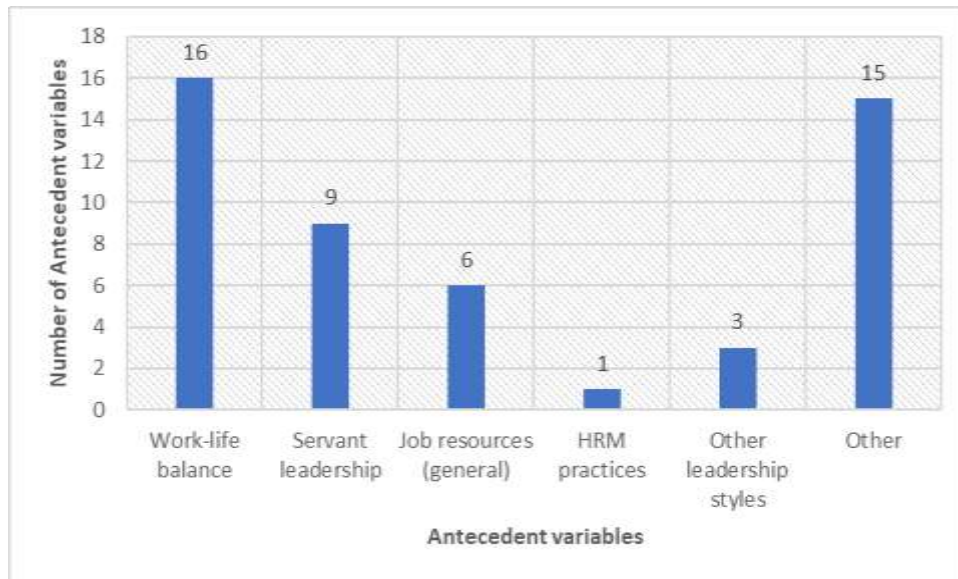


**Figure 5.** The Distribution of Organizational Contexts in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 5, employee engagement research is most frequently conducted in service organizations, accounting for 14 studies, followed by the hospitality and tourism sector with 8 studies. In contrast, manufacturing organizations are represented in only one study, while public sector organizations appear in three studies. Notably, no studies explicitly focus on professional service firms as the primary organizational context. A considerable proportion of studies (24 articles) fall under the other category, which includes multi-sector studies (13 articles), mixed organizational settings (6 articles), as well as specific contexts such as banking (2 articles), IT sector (1 article), knowledge-intensive organizations (1 article), and SMEs (1 article). This distribution indicates both a concentration of engagement research in service-related environments and a substantial lack of contextual specificity across the reviewed literature.

### **Antecedent variables**

Antecedent variables refer to factors that are assumed to influence or predict employee engagement in empirical studies. Examining the distribution of antecedent variables is important because it reveals which organizational, leadership, and individual factors have received the greatest research attention and how employee engagement is commonly positioned within explanatory research models.

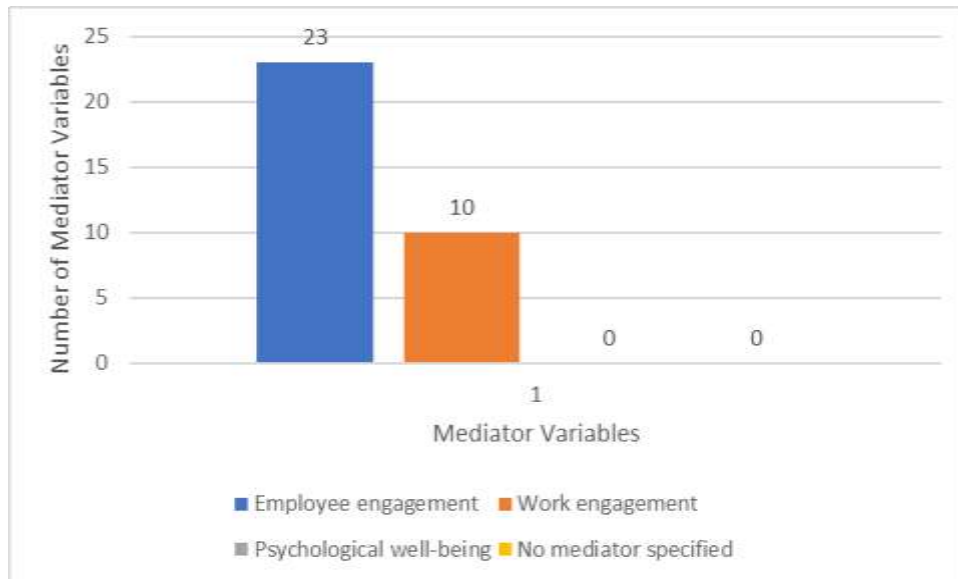


**Figure 6.** The Distribution of Antecedent Variables of Employee Engagement

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 6, work-life balance emerges as the most frequently examined antecedent of employee engagement, appearing in 16 studies, followed by servant leadership with 9 studies. General job resources are examined in 6 studies, while HRM practices appear in only one study. Other leadership styles, such as ethical or supportive leadership, are represented in three studies. A substantial number of studies (15 articles) fall under the other antecedents category, which includes constructs such as engagement-related variables (5 studies), engagement drivers (2 studies), and JD-R-related variables (2 studies), as well as more specific factors such as caring HRM, ethical leadership, HR interventions, job crafting, personality, and general interventions. This distribution indicates that while work-life balance and servant leadership dominate the literature, employee engagement research also draws on a diverse set of less frequently examined antecedents.

### **Mediator Variables**

Mediator variables represent the mechanisms through which antecedent variables influence employee engagement or related outcomes in empirical research models. Examining mediator variables is important because it reveals how employee engagement is theoretically positioned whether as a direct outcome or as an explanatory process linking organizational factors to performance or well-being.

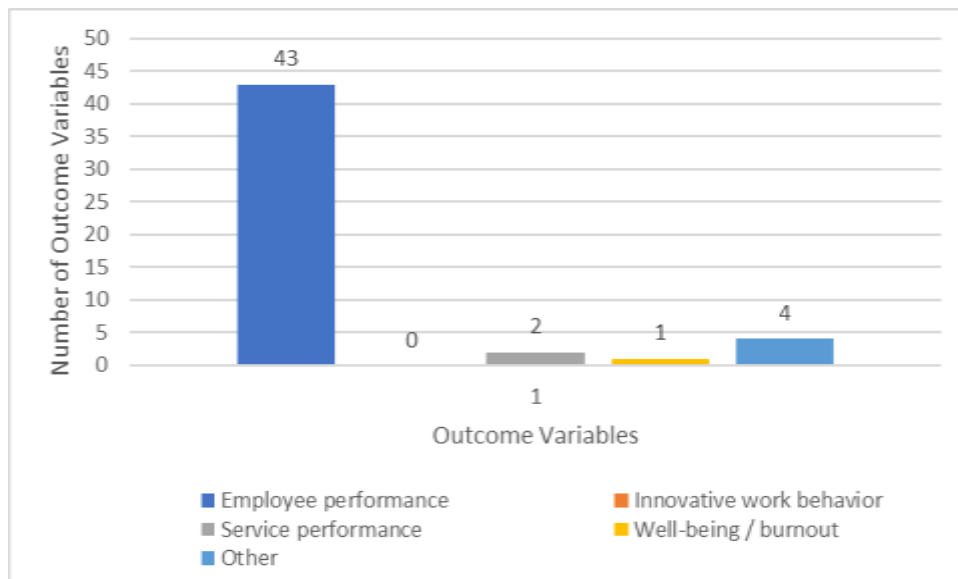


**Figure 7.** The Distribution of Mediator Variables in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 7, employee engagement is the most frequently examined mediating variable, appearing in 23 studies, followed by work engagement in 10 studies. No studies explicitly use psychological well-being as a mediating variable, and no studies specify the absence of a mediator as a primary model feature. A notable number of studies (17 articles) fall under the other mediators category. Within this group, engagement-related constructs account for 13 studies, while two studies do not specify a mediating variable. Additionally, burnout and work-life balance each appear as mediators in one study. This distribution indicates a strong tendency to conceptualize engagement-related constructs as central explanatory mechanisms, while alternative mediators remain largely underexplored.

### Outcome variables

Outcome variables refer to the consequences or results examined in relation to employee engagement in empirical research models. Analyzing outcome variables is important because it reveals the primary objectives of employee engagement research and indicates whether engagement is mainly associated with performance-related outcomes, well-being indicators, or other organizational benefits.

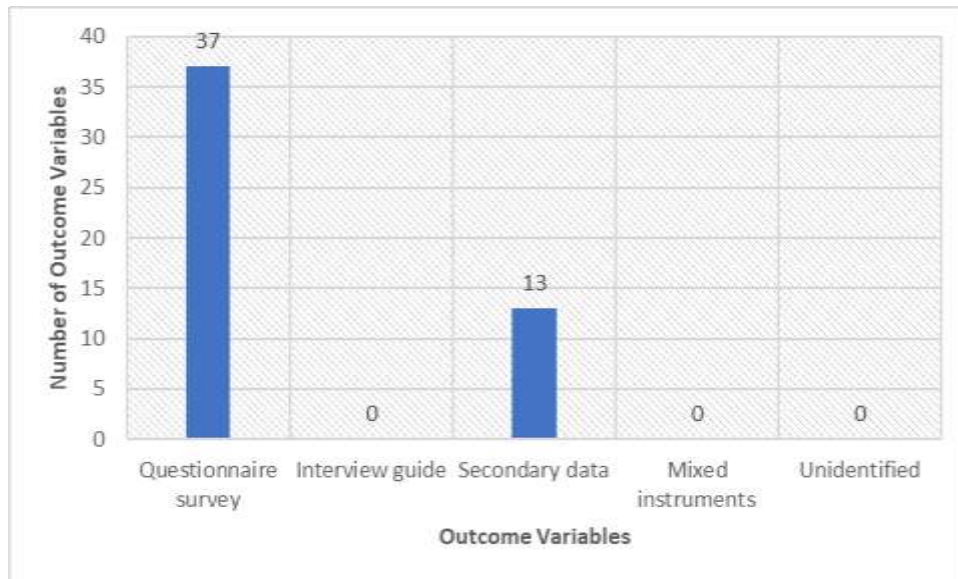


**Figure 8.** The Distribution of Outcome Variables in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 8, employee performance is by far the most frequently examined outcome variable, appearing in 43 studies. In contrast, service performance is examined in only two studies, while well-being or burnout-related outcomes appear in one study. Notably, innovative work behavior does not appear as an outcome variable in the reviewed studies. A small number of studies (four articles) fall under the other outcomes category, which includes organizational advantage (one study), daily performance (one study), and engagement-related outcomes (two studies). This distribution indicates that employee engagement research is strongly performance-oriented, with relatively limited attention given to non-performance and sustainability-related outcomes.

### Data collection instruments

Data collection instruments refer to the tools and techniques used by researchers to gather empirical data from research subjects. Examining data collection instruments is important because the choice of instruments influences the type of data obtained, the depth of analysis, and the overall validity of research findings in employee engagement studies.

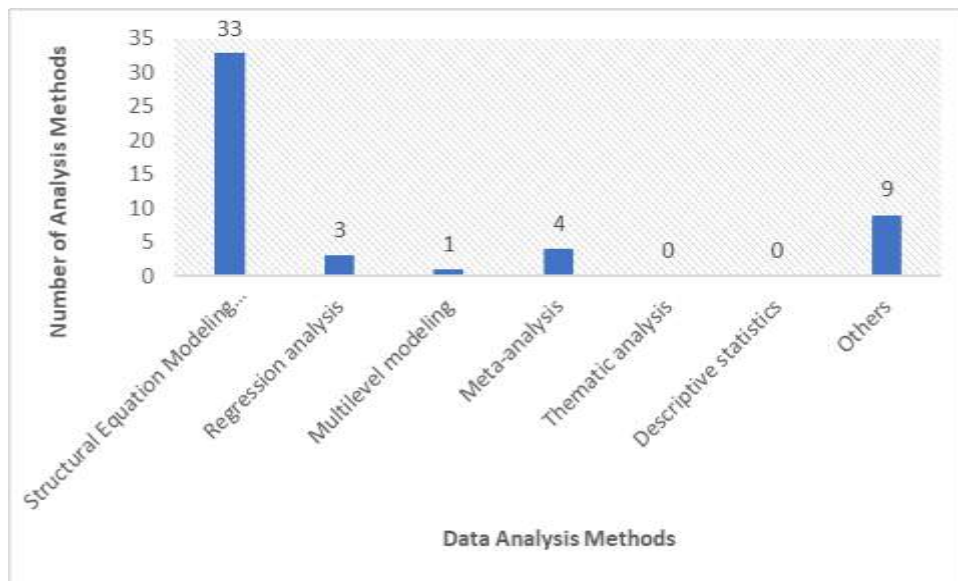


**Figure 9.** The Distribution of Data Collection Instruments in Employee Engagement Studies

Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 9, questionnaire surveys are the most frequently used data collection instrument, appearing in 37 studies. In addition, secondary data sources are employed in 13 studies, primarily in review-based research. Notably, no studies utilize interview guides, mixed instruments, or unspecified data collection methods. This distribution indicates a strong reliance on questionnaire-based data collection in employee engagement research, with limited use of alternative instruments that could provide richer or multi-source data.

### **Data analysis methods**

Data analysis methods refer to the analytical techniques used to examine and interpret research data in empirical and review-based studies. Examining data analysis methods is important because it reflects the level of methodological complexity and the analytical orientation adopted by researchers in studying employee engagement.



**Figure 10.** The Distribution of Data Analysis Methods in Employee Engagement Studies Referring to the distribution shown in Figure 10, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is the most frequently used data analysis method, appearing in 33 studies. Other quantitative techniques, such as regression analysis and multilevel modeling, are used in only three and one study, respectively. Meta-analytical techniques appear in four studies, primarily within review-based research. No studies employ thematic analysis or descriptive statistical analysis as their primary analytical approach. A notable number of studies (nine articles) fall under the other methods category, which includes conceptual analysis (two studies), content analysis (two studies), narrative analysis (one study), as well as review-based and systematic literature review approaches (four studies in total). This distribution indicates a strong reliance on advanced multivariate techniques, particularly SEM, in employee engagement research.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the patterns identified in the findings by interpreting the distributions presented in Figures 1-10 and situating them within the broader development of employee engagement research in Human Resource Management.

### Evolution and Maturity of Employee Engagement Research

The increasing number of publications over time, as shown in Figure 1, indicates that employee engagement has evolved into a well-established research domain within HRM. The sustained growth in publication volume reflects heightened scholarly recognition of engagement as a central construct for understanding employee behavior, performance, and organizational effectiveness. This trend suggests that engagement research has moved beyond its early conceptual phase toward a more mature stage characterized by empirical model testing and systematic synthesis.

### **Methodological Concentration and Its Implications**

The dominance of quantitative research and cross-sectional survey designs, reflected in Figures 2 and 3, highlights a strong methodological concentration in the literature. While this pattern demonstrates the field's emphasis on theory testing and causal modeling, it also raises concerns regarding methodological homogeneity. Employee engagement is widely theorized as a dynamic psychological state, yet the prevalence of single-wave designs limits the ability of existing studies to capture temporal changes and causal processes. The limited use of longitudinal, intervention-based, and multilevel designs indicates an important methodological gap that future research should address.

### **Limited Diversity of Research Subjects and Contexts**

The distributions of research subjects and organizational contexts shown in Figures 4 and 5 reveal that employee engagement research predominantly focuses on general employee populations within service-oriented organizations. This narrow focus suggests that engagement is often treated as a universal phenomenon, with limited consideration of how engagement may differ across occupational roles or organizational settings. The underrepresentation of professional, knowledge-intensive, manufacturing, and public sector contexts constrains the generalizability of existing findings and points to the need for more context-sensitive engagement research.

### **Dominant Explanatory Frameworks in Engagement Research**

The patterns observed in Figures 6 and 7 indicate that work-life balance and servant leadership are the most frequently examined antecedents, while employee engagement is predominantly positioned as a mediating mechanism. This configuration reflects a strong reliance on human-centered and resource-based explanations of engagement, where organizational support and leadership practices are assumed to influence outcomes through employees' psychological engagement. However, the wide range of less frequently examined antecedents and mediators suggests conceptual fragmentation, with limited integration across explanatory frameworks.

### **Outcome Orientation and Conceptual Boundaries**

The strong emphasis on performance-related outcomes, as illustrated in Figure 8, underscores the instrumental orientation of employee engagement research. While this focus aligns engagement with organizational performance objectives, it also narrows the conceptual scope of the literature. The limited attention to well-being, sustainability, and non-performance outcomes suggests that engagement research may insufficiently address long-term employee and organizational health. Broadening the range of outcomes examined could enhance the relevance of engagement research in contemporary HRM debates.

### **Methodological Homogeneity in Data Collection and Analysis**

Figures 9 and 10 reveal a high degree of consistency in data collection instruments and analytical techniques, with questionnaire-based surveys and Structural Equation Modeling dominating the literature. Although these methods enable sophisticated model testing, their extensive use raises concerns regarding common method bias and limits methodological innovation. The scarcity of qualitative approaches, mixed methods, and alternative analytical strategies indicates opportunities for future research to diversify methodological approaches and deepen theoretical understanding.

### **Integrated Interpretation**

Taken together, the patterns across Figures 1–10 suggest that employee engagement research within HRM is characterized by empirical growth and theoretical consolidation, alongside notable methodological and contextual limitations. The literature has successfully established engagement as a central explanatory construct, yet further progress requires greater methodological diversity, broader contextual coverage, and more integrative theoretical models. Addressing these issues will be essential for advancing employee engagement research beyond its current dominant paradigms.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic content analysis provides a comprehensive overview of research trends on employee engagement within the Human Resource Management literature based on the examination of 50 peer-reviewed articles. By synthesizing patterns across publication trends, research designs, subjects, organizational contexts, variables, and methodological approaches, this study offers a structured understanding of how employee engagement research has evolved and where critical gaps remain. The findings indicate a steady growth in employee engagement research over time, reflecting increasing scholarly interest in engagement as a central construct in contemporary work settings. Methodologically, the literature is dominated by quantitative, survey-based studies using cross-sectional designs and advanced multivariate techniques, particularly Structural Equation Modeling. While this dominance demonstrates the maturity of engagement research in terms of model testing, it also highlights a limited exploration of longitudinal, intervention-based, and multi-level approaches capable of capturing the dynamic nature of employee engagement. In terms of research focus, employee engagement studies predominantly examine general employee populations and are largely conducted within service-oriented organizational contexts. Professional and knowledge-intensive work environments, as well as manufacturing and public sector settings, remain underrepresented. Substantively, work-life balance and servant leadership emerge as the most frequently examined antecedents of employee engagement, underscoring the importance of human-

centered organizational practices. Employee engagement is primarily positioned as a mediating psychological mechanism linking antecedent variables to performance-related outcomes, with employee performance serving as the dominant outcome variable. Overall, this study demonstrates that employee engagement research within HRM is empirically rich but methodologically concentrated and contextually uneven. By mapping existing research patterns through a systematic content analysis, this review contributes to a clearer understanding of the strengths and limitations of the current literature and provides a foundation for future research aimed at advancing more diverse, context-sensitive, and theoretically integrative models of employee engagement.

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