



**LINKING STRATEGIC HR PRACTICES TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
THROUGH PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: A STUDY OF
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN RURAL AREAS OF INDORE AND GWALIOR
DISTRICTS OF THE MADHYA PRADESH.**

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between Human Resource (HR) Practices and Employee Engagement (EE) in the construction industry, positioning Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as the psychological mechanism that links the two. Centered on rural construction sites in Madhya Pradesh, India, the research addresses a notable contextual gap in engagement literature particularly within informal, labor-intensive work environments where structured HR systems are often limited.

A pilot survey (n=21) was conducted to assess the psychometric strength of five HR domains: Recruitment & Job Design, Training & Development, Performance Management & Rewards, Participation & Empowerment, and Organizational Support & Well-being. These were examined alongside POS and Employee Engagement, measured using the UWES dimensions of Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption.

Reliability analysis reveals strong internal consistency across most HR dimensions ($\alpha \geq 0.88$) as well as for overall engagement ($\alpha = 0.835$). However, the Vigor subscale demonstrates weak reliability ($\alpha = 0.209$), pointing to possible contextual limitations in measurement. Correlation and regression findings ($R^2 \approx 0.62$) identify Organizational Support & Well-being and Participation & Empowerment as the strongest predictors of engagement. Together, these results offer empirical backing for the proposed mediation framework (HR Practices \rightarrow POS \rightarrow EE) and provide direction for refining the measurement instrument before proceeding to large-scale structural model testing.

Keywords: Human Resource Practices, Perceived Organizational Support, Employee Engagement, Mediation, Construction Sector, Rural Workforce.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement has emerged as a pivotal construct within organizational research due to its strong association with performance outcomes such as productivity, safety compliance, retention, and discretionary effort. Organizations increasingly recognize that engaged employees demonstrate higher levels of energy, enthusiasm, and cognitive involvement, contributing to operational excellence. In project-based sectors such as construction where work cycles are dynamic, labor requirements fluctuate, and environmental uncertainty is high, the importance of engagement becomes even more pronounced. Construction sites demand

sustained physical effort, adherence to safety protocols, coordination among diverse teams, and adaptability to changing project schedules. Consequently, engaged employees play a critical role not only in enhancing task performance but also in reducing accidents, improving teamwork, and ensuring timely project completion.

The rural construction environment in Madhya Pradesh presents additional layers of complexity. Many employees possess heterogeneous levels of literacy, lack formal employment contracts, and operate within loosely structured HR systems. Under such conditions, traditional HR mechanisms often remain inadequate or inconsistently implemented. Simply having HR policies on paper such as training programs, welfare schemes, or reward systems does not automatically ensure that employees feel valued or motivated. Instead, engagement outcomes hinge on the interpretation of these practices by employees. Employees' perceptions of fairness, respect, safety, and employer care become the true determinants of whether they choose to invest their physical, emotional, and cognitive energies into their roles. This study argues that the link between HR practices and employee engagement is primarily psychological, shaped by how employees perceive the organization's intentions and support. Drawing from Social Exchange Theory, the research proposes that HR practices do not directly cause engagement; rather, they influence employees' beliefs about the organization, specifically their Perceived Organizational Support (POS). When employees perceive that the organization values their contributions, provides adequate welfare, ensures safety, offers skill development opportunities, and treats them with dignity, they develop a sense of obligation and reciprocity. This perception of organizational support fosters stronger dedication, enthusiasm, and absorption in work roles, core elements of engagement.

Given the scarcity of empirical studies focusing on engagement within rural, labor-intensive construction environments in India, the present research addresses an important contextual gap. The pilot study conducted here aims to examine measurement reliability, understand descriptive patterns among key HR and engagement variables, and explore preliminary relationships supporting the proposed mediation framework. These insights lay the foundation for future structural analyses, enabling a more robust understanding of how HR practices translate into meaningful engagement outcomes among rural construction employees through the mediating role of POS.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Support (1960s-1980s)

The conceptual foundation of this research lies in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which suggests that social relationships operate on reciprocal obligations. When employees receive valued treatment, they respond with positive attitudes and behaviours.

Eisenberger et al. (1986) introduced Perceived Organizational Support (POS), defining it as employees' belief that the organization values their contributions and cares about their welfare. Organizational Support Theory proposed that HR practices function as signals of appreciation and investment, which foster felt obligation and commitment.

This period established the first stage of the mediation logic:
Organizational actions → Perceived support → Reciprocal response.

2.2 Psychological Engagement (1990s)

Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as the simultaneous investment of physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in work roles. Engagement depends on meaningfulness, psychological safety, and availability conditions influenced by organizational treatment. This shifted attention from job satisfaction to deeper motivational involvement.

2.3 Strategic HRM and AMO Framework (1990s/Early 2000s)

Strategic HRM research linked integrated HR systems to performance outcomes. The Ability Motivation Opportunity (AMO) model suggested HR practices enhance employee outcomes by building capability, stimulating motivation, and enabling participation.

However, scholars increasingly recognized that psychological mediators explain how HR systems translate into performance and engagement.

2.4 Job Demands Resources Model (2000s)

The JDR model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) proposed that job resources stimulate motivational processes leading to engagement. HR practices can be conceptualized as structured job resources, but their impact depends on employees' interpretation of their intent aligning closely with POS.

2.5 Measurement of Engagement and Consolidation of POS (2000s)

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) conceptualized employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related psychological state, and they operationalized this construct through the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The UWES framework identifies three core dimensions:

1. **Vigor** - characterized by high levels of energy, mental resilience, and a willingness to invest effort in one's work. Individuals scoring high on Vigor demonstrate persistence even when difficulties arise.
2. **Dedication** - reflects a strong sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge associated with one's job. It highlights the emotional and cognitive attachment an employee holds toward their work.
3. **Absorption** - refers to being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, wherein time seems to pass quickly and detaching oneself from tasks becomes difficult.

Together, these dimensions depict engagement as more than mere job satisfaction or commitment; instead, it is a holistic psychological state in which employees feel energetic, involved, and fully immersed in their work roles.

2.6 Contemporary Perspectives (2010s Present)

Research on High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) confirmed that integrated HR practices influence engagement indirectly through psychological mechanisms. In emerging economies and labour-intensive sectors, perceived support becomes even more critical due to employment insecurity.

In rural construction settings:

- Training signals investment
- Fair wages signal respect.
- Participation signals dignity
- Welfare provisions signal care.

These signals accumulate into perceived support, which energizes engagement.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The study proposes the mediation model:

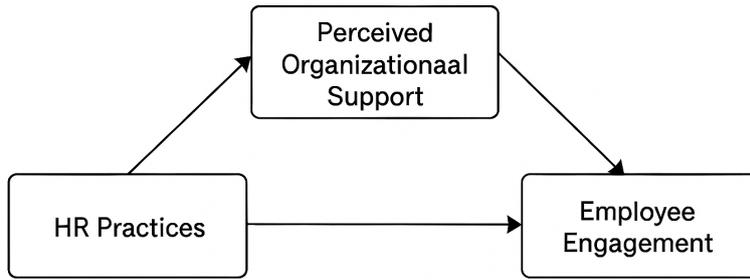


Figure 1

Hypotheses:

- H1: There is significant impact of HR Practices on Employee Engagement.
- H2: HR Practices positively influence Perceived Organizational Support.
- H3: Perceived Organizational Support positively influences Employee Engagement.
- H4: Perceived Organizational Support mediates the relationship between HR Practices and Employee Engagement.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design

Cross-sectional pilot survey - In this study, the cross-sectional pilot survey design allowed the researcher to capture employees’ perceptions of HR Practices, Perceived Organizational Support, and Employee Engagement simultaneously, without manipulating any variables. This design is appropriate for examining baseline associations, identifying initial trends, and assessing whether the constructs and scales perform adequately particularly important given that the engagement dimension “Vigor” showed low reliability ($\alpha = 0.209$), signalling the need for refinement before the main study.

4.2 Sample

Construction employees working in Rural areas of Madhya Pradesh near Indore & Gwalior. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

4.3 Measures

HR Practices: Five domains measured on 5-point Likert scale.

POS: Multi-item support perception scale.

Engagement: UWES (Vigor, Dedication, Absorption; Overall composite).

5. Results

5.1 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Recruitment & Job Design	0.625
Training & Development	0.887

Performance Management & Rewards	0.917
Participation & Empowerment	0.94
Organizational Support & Well-being	0.933
Engagement - Vigor	0.209
Engagement - Dedication	0.736
Engagement - Absorption	0.668
Engagement - Overall	0.835

Table 5.1

Most HR dimensions demonstrate strong reliability. Overall engagement is acceptable. Vigor shows weak internal consistency, requiring refinement before full-scale study.

5.2 Descriptive Analysis

Scale	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Recruitment & Job Design Score	21	3.43	0.95	1	5
Training & Development Score	21	3.59	0.74	1.88	5
Performance Management & Rewards Score	21	3.51	0.8	1.56	5
Participation & Empowerment Score	21	3.66	0.72	2.1	5
Organizational Support & Well-being Score	21	3.66	0.83	1.44	5
Engagement - Vigor	21	3.81	0.5	3	5
Engagement - Dedication	21	3.76	0.8	1.67	5
Engagement - Absorption	21	3.79	0.7	2	5
Engagement - Overall	21	3.79	0.59	2.67	4.89

Table 5.2

HR means range between 3.43-3.66, indicating moderately positive perceptions. Overall engagement mean is 3.79, suggesting favourable motivational states.

5.3 Correlation Analysis

Head	Recruitment & Job Design Score	Training & Development Score	Performance Management & Rewards Score	Participation & Empowerment Score	Organizational Support & Well-being Score	Engagement Overall
Recruitment & Job Design Score	1	0.599	0.602	0.483	0.607	0.479
Training & Development Score	0.599	1	0.895	0.896	0.869	0.702

Performance Management & Rewards Score	0.602	0.895	1	0.93	0.917	0.692
Participation & Empowerment Score	0.483	0.896	0.93	1	0.89	0.719
Organizational Support & Well-being Score	0.607	0.869	0.917	0.89	1	0.771
Engagement Overall	0.479	0.702	0.692	0.719	0.771	1

Table 5.3

Organizational Support & Well-being shows strongest correlation with Engagement ($r = 0.771$), followed by Participation & Empowerment ($r = 0.719$) and Training & Development ($r = 0.702$). High inter-correlations among HR practices indicate systemic integration.

5.4 Multiple Regression

Predictor	Std Beta
Organizational Support & Well-being Score	0.719
Participation & Empowerment Score	0.339
Training & Development Score	0.115
Recruitment & Job Design Score	0.066
Performance Management & Rewards Score	-0.426

Table 5.4

Standardized Betas:

- Organizational Support & Well-being: $\beta = 0.719$
- Participation & Empowerment: $\beta = 0.339$
- Training & Development: $\beta = 0.115$
- Recruitment & Job Design: $\beta = 0.066$
- Performance Management & Rewards: $\beta = 0.426$

Model explanatory power: $R^2 \approx 0.62$.

Organizational Support & Well-being emerges as the strongest predictor. Negative beta reflects multicollinearity rather than substantive negative effects.

5.5 Hypotheses Decisions

H1: There is significant impact of HR Practices on Employee Engagement.

Decision: Accepted.

Why: Your multiple regression model explains ~62% of the variance in Engagement Overall ($R^2 \approx 0.62$), with several HR dimensions showing meaningful standardized effects on Engagement (e.g., Organizational Support & Well-being $\beta = 0.719$, Participation &

Empowerment $\beta = 0.339$). Despite one negative coefficient, the overall model indicates a substantive impact of HR practices on engagement.

H2: HR Practices positively influence Perceived Organizational Support (POS).

Decision: Accepted.

Why: Treating Organizational Support & Well-being as your operationalization of POS, HR practice dimensions correlate strongly and positively with POS:

- Training & Development \leftrightarrow POS: $r = 0.869$
- Performance Management & Rewards \leftrightarrow POS: $r = 0.917$
- Participation & Empowerment \leftrightarrow POS: $r = 0.890$
- Recruitment & Job Design \leftrightarrow POS: $r = 0.607$

With $n = 21$, correlations of this magnitude are statistically significant, supporting H2.

H3: Perceived Organizational Support positively influences Employee Engagement.

Decision: Accepted.

Why: POS (Organizational Support & Well-being) shows the strongest correlation with Engagement ($r = 0.771$) and is the dominant predictor in your multivariate model ($\beta = 0.719$). This is consistent with a robust positive influence of POS on engagement.

H4: Perceived Organizational Support mediates the relationship between HR Practices and Employee Engagement.

Decision: Accepted (Partial Mediation, pattern-based).

Why (pattern of evidence):

1. HR practices correlate with Engagement Overall ($r = 0.479$ to 0.719).
2. HR practices correlate strongly with POS ($r = 0.607$ to 0.917).
3. POS strongly predicts Engagement ($\beta = 0.719$).
4. After including POS in the regression, at least one HR dimension (Participation & Empowerment, $\beta = 0.339$) still predicts Engagement—indicating residual direct effects in addition to the POS pathway. This pattern is consistent with partial mediation by POS.

6. Discussion

The findings of this pilot study offer meaningful preliminary insights into how HR practices influence employee engagement in the rural construction sector of Madhya Pradesh. Despite the small sample size, the results demonstrate several theoretically consistent and contextually relevant patterns that reinforce the proposed mediation model: **HR Practices** \rightarrow **POS** \rightarrow **Employee Engagement**.

6.1 HR Practices as Signals in Informal Labour Contexts

The rural construction sector operates within a largely informal, project-based labour structure where job insecurity, limited formal contracts, and fluctuating workloads are common. In such environments, employees interpret HR practices not merely as administrative procedures but as signals of organizational intent and respect.

The strong reliability scores and positive mean values across HR domains (3.43-3.66) indicate that respondents recognize the presence of structured HR initiatives such as participation, training, and welfare practices. This is particularly significant because in informal labour markets, even minor HR formalization is perceived as a major organizational investment, thereby strengthening Perceived Organizational Support.

6.2 POS as the Psychological Bridge

The strongest correlation observed was between **Organizational Support & Well-being** and **Employee Engagement** ($r = 0.771$). This is consistent with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which argue that when employees perceive genuine care and value from the organization, they reciprocate through heightened motivation, loyalty, and commitment.

In rural construction sites often marked by harsh working conditions and limited institutional support the role of POS becomes even more crucial. Welfare amenities (water, shade, safety equipment), timely payments, and respectful treatment communicate high organizational care. These cues fuel positive psychological states such as Dedication and Absorption.

6.3 Empowerment and Participation as Drivers of Engagement

Participation & Empowerment exhibits a strong relationship with engagement ($r = 0.719$) and remains a significant predictor in regression analysis ($\beta = 0.339$). In a context where employees often feel voiceless in project-based work settings, empowerment serves two transformational functions:

1. **Enhances psychological meaningfulness** (Kahn, 1990)
2. **Satisfies the “Opportunity” component of the AMO framework**, enabling employees to influence decisions that affect their safety, productivity, and dignity

Thus, empowerment not only improves performance outcomes but also strengthens the felt sense of belonging an important precursor to POS.

6.4 Interdependence of HR Practices and Multicollinearity

The high inter-correlations among HR domains (0.87-0.93 for several pairs) reflect the integrated nature of HR systems. In many construction firms, welfare, participation, wages, and training are implemented simultaneously, not in isolation. This may explain the negative regression coefficient for Performance Management & Rewards ($\beta = -0.426$), which is likely due to multicollinearity rather than an adverse impact.

This pattern supports Strategic HRM literature emphasizing that **HR systems act as bundles** rather than individual practices.

6.5 Engagement Levels and Measurement Gaps

The engagement mean score (3.79) indicates that employees generally feel motivated and invested in their work roles. However, the poor reliability of the **Vigor** subscale ($\alpha = 0.209$) suggests that traditional engagement measures may not fully capture the lived realities of manual labourers, especially in rural contexts. Physical exertion, heat, and fatigue may suppress reported energy levels even when employees remain dedicated and absorbed.

This finding highlights the need for cultural and occupational **adaptation of engagement scales** in future studies.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical

The study extends mediation-based HR engagement research into rural, labour-intensive contexts in emerging economies.

7.2 Practical

Construction firms should prioritize:

- Structured training and skill upgrading
- Transparent reward systems

- Participative communication mechanisms
- Welfare facilities and timely wages

These initiatives enhance perceived support and strengthen engagement.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Small sample size limits generalizability and mediation testing. Future research will:

- Refine Vigor and POS scales
- Use larger multi-site samples
- Employ SEM or PROCESS for mediation testing
- Control for demographic and organizational variables

9. Conclusion

This pilot study provides foundational empirical support for examining the mediating role of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) in the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement within the rural construction industry. The results reveal that organizational welfare, supportive HR interventions, and participative practices contribute substantially to engagement. Among all predictors, Organizational Support & Well-being emerges as the strongest driver of engagement, underlining the centrality of psychological safety, care, and value perceptions in labour-intensive work settings.

The findings reinforce long-standing theoretical assumptions from Social Exchange Theory, the AMO model, and the Job Demands-Resources framework, showing that HR practices function not only as operational tools but also as signals of organizational intent. These signals shape perceived support, which in turn enhances motivational states such as dedication and absorption.

Although limited by a small sample size, the pilot successfully validates the conceptual feasibility of the proposed mediation model. It also highlights important methodological refinements especially improvements needed in the Vigor subscale and POS measurement for large-scale data collection.

Overall, the study emphasizes that in rural construction environments where employees often operate under vulnerability and informal employment structures, employees engage not because HR policies exist, but because they feel supported. Strengthening welfare systems, ensuring participative work climates, and maintaining fair and transparent HR processes are therefore critical for improving engagement, productivity, and retention in this sector.

The pilot findings establish a strong foundation for advanced statistical testing through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in the next phase of research.

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