

Employee engagement through HRM practices: The impact of organizational support and individual differences

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Abstract

The social exchange theory (SET) has been used to explain employee engagement through rule of reciprocity. Reciprocity would influence employees to engage in work by responding to the economic and socioemotional resources provided by the organization. However, SET does not adequately explain why the degree of these reciprocal exchanges would vary among individuals resulting in varying levels of engagement, even within the same organizational context. This theoretical paper aims to address this lacuna by exploring the conditions under which organizational human resource management (HRM) practices would lead to high levels of engagement. Accordingly, the paper postulates that perceived organizational support (POS) will mediate the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement. Further, based on the dualistic exchange structure of relations and contractual governance, it suggests that the norm of reciprocity and self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between POS and employee engagement. This highlights the individual difference—conditions under which reciprocal exchange is most likely to occur. The main theoretical contributions of the paper is that it integrates two forms of reciprocity within the same conceptualization, expands the boundary conditions of the organizational support theory (OST) by better positioning POS as a mediator within the HRM—engagement relationship. This also extends previous research where POS was mainly focused on as an antecedent of engagement. Further, the paper integrates two forms of reciprocity within the same conceptualization, and through the moderating effect of norm of reciprocity and self-efficacy.

Keywords: Employee engagement, HRM practices, Perceived organizational support, Norm of reciprocity, Self-efficacy, Social exchange