



# Employee Engagement as Human Motivation: Implications for Theory, Methods, and Practice

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## Abstract

The central theoretical construct in human resource management today is employee engagement. Despite its centrality, clear theoretical and operational definitions are few and far between, with most treatments failing to separate causes from effects, psychological variables from organizational variables, and internal from external mechanisms. This paper argues for a more sophisticated approach to the engagement concept, grounding it in the vast psychological literature on human motivation. Herein lies the contribution of our paper; we argue that the apparent diversity of operational definitions employed by academics and practitioners can be understood as tentative attempts to draw ever nearer to key motivational concepts, but never quite get there. We review the leading definitions of employee engagement in the literature and find that they are reducible to a core set of human motives, each backed by full literatures of their own, which populate a comprehensive model of twelve human motivations. We propose that there is substantial value in adopting a comprehensive motivational taxonomy over current approaches, which have the effect of “snowballing” ever more constructs adopted from a variety of fields and theoretical traditions. We consider the impact of rooting engagement concepts in existing motivational constructs for each of the following: (a) theory, especially the development of engagement systems; (b) methods, including the value of applying a comprehensive, structural approach; and (c) practice, where we emphasize the practical advantages of clear operational definitions.

**Keywords** Employee engagement · Employee motivation · Motivation · Emotion · Employee emotion · Spirituality

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## Introduction

Despite the centrality of the employee engagement concept, clear theoretical and operational definitions are few and far between, with most treatments failing to separate causes from effects, psychological variables from organizational variables, and internal from external mechanisms. This paper argues for a more sophisticated approach to the engagement concept, grounding it in the vast psychological literature on human motivation.

### The Current State of Theory

In social science research, it is always good practice to try to distinguish causes and effects in theoretical models, resulting in testable propositions. Much of the theoretical work of both academics and practitioners<sup>1</sup> in the domain of employee engagement has unfortunately neglected this fundamental step, instead adopting a list generation approach, enumerating all the exogenous and endogenous variables that could, should, or might be expected to co-occur with engagement. This approach has returned long lists of items with little regard for separating causes from effects, psychological variables from organizational variables, states from traits, and the cognitive from the emotional from the behavioral. In a literature review, Kular et al., (2008) concluded that despite the “great deal of interest in engagement, there is also a good deal of confusion. At present, there is no consistency in definition, with engagement having been operationalized and measured in many disparate ways.” Nearly a decade later in a subsequent literature review, Dewing & McCormack (2015) observe that “it is a challenge to find much substance or a clear definition for the concept of engagement... Further, it is unclear how the construct relates to other existing similar concepts...” (p. 2). As suggested by these, and indeed virtually all authors on this subject, the term employee engagement has remained stubbornly muddled, conflated, and confused, a victim of entangled, conflated pseudo-definitions that overlap heavily with related but distinct concepts such as job engagement, work engagement, organizational engagement, intellectual-social-affective engagement, and collective organizational engagement (Albrecht, 2010). In this way, the academic and practitioner literatures have been subjected to a kind of “snowballing effect” as authors apply different theoretical models bringing with them a host of new constructs, while also applying ever more synonyms for existing constructs (for examples, see list of keywords used in literature review below).

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<sup>1</sup> An array of theoretical and measurement systems have been proposed by human resources consulting practitioners for the employee engagement construct (Pincus, 2020). Zigarmi et al. (2009) clearly differentiate between increasingly divergent practitioner and academic approaches to conceptualizing, defining, and operationalizing employee engagement. A burgeoning volume of measures and concepts has been growing rapidly from the “bottom-up” through the efforts of practitioners having the effect of widening the gap over time between academic concepts with psychometrically validated measures and unsystematic pragmatic approaches. Although the practitioner perspective is valuable, and our general conclusions and suggestions extend equally to them, for the purposes of the current paper we limit our focus to peer-reviewed academic systems.

The need for conceptual clarity is particularly acute for the concept of engagement. By one account, few business concepts have resonated as strongly as has employee engagement (Schneider et al., 2009). This strong and growing interest is confirmed by Google Trends (accessed August 28, 2020), which shows a steady upward trend in Google searches involving the phrase “employee engagement” beginning in April 2004 (their earliest data) at an index of 0, increasing to an index of 100 in July 2020 (indicating the strongest search volume to date). It is important to note that, despite the obvious relevance of the engagement concept to employee emotional wellness, this upward trend in interest pre-dates the current COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, studies have found significant linkages between employee engagement and physical and mental health (Harter et al., 2003; Porath et al., 2012; Sonnentag, 2003; Spreitzer et al., 2005). In light of this trend, providing a clear definition of employee engagement isn’t just a good idea for developing theory and measurement, it may be important for improving public health.

Although no universally accepted definition of employee engagement exists, Shuck (2011) has extensively reviewed the literature and identified four dominant research streams: Kahn’s (1990) need-satisfying approach, Maslach et al.’s (2001) burnout-antithesis approach, Harter et al.’s (2002) satisfaction-engagement approach, and Saks’ (2006) multidimensional approach. These four streams are derived from entirely different research traditions: organizational behavior (Kahn), social psychology (Maslach), commercial polling (Harter), and human resource management (Saks) and, accordingly, can be thought of as four descriptions made by the proverbial men around the elephant, each absolutely correct in his description, but none able to adequately describe the holistic essence of the phenomenon. In the spirit of crowdsourcing, we will keep track of every postulated component and subcomponent described by each tradition before attempting to apply an overarching model to encompass them all.

## Epistemological Foundations

We now make a very short digression into epistemology, noting only that the dominant models of employee engagement all seem to tacitly assume the operation of the Stimulus → Organism → Response (S-O-R) model, which has been the dominant assumption in psychology since the close of the behaviorist era. In this formulation, external, environmental stimuli are perceived and acted upon in the brain of the individual organism, which mediates and causes observable behavior; accordingly, this is known as the *mediation* model and provides a scaffolding to separate causes from effects at two stages: external causes of internal effects and internal causes of behavioral effects. This presupposes asymmetrical relations between causes and effects (i.e., effects don’t cause causes) and should provide clear guidance for determining the role of different variables in the chain of causation by asking questions such as “Is X an external, environmental stimulus, a psychological response, or a behavioral

outcome?” and “Does X cause Y or vice-versa?” But, as we will show, this has often not been the case in the employee engagement literature.<sup>2</sup>

### Do Engagement Concepts Refer to Stimulus, Organism, or Response?

Key constructs related to employee engagement have a nasty habit of showing up in different S-O-R roles at different times. For example, *autonomy* is part of the definition of engagement proposed by Maslach et al. (2001), but it is also an antecedent condition in the Hackman & Oldham (1980) system employed by Kahn (1990). *Autonomy* also shows up as an antecedent in discussion of *role breadth* (Morgeson et al., 2005), and again as an outcome in *extra-role behavior* or *role-expansion* (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004). It is unclear whether a behavioral intention like *taking charge* is a cause of engagement, a marker of engagement, or a consequence of engagement.

The same pattern is observed with regard to the construct of *psychological presence*. On the one hand, Kahn (1990) defines engagement itself as a harnessing of the self within the work role. On the other hand, the construct of *organizational commitment*, defined in a seminal paper as an outcome variable (Saks, 2006), is defined by the projection of the self into the organization (e.g., “Working at my organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me”; “I feel personally attached to my work organization”). We are left to wonder if projecting one’s self into one’s work is a cause of engagement, an indicator of engagement, or an outcome of engagement.

Again we see this pattern with regard to the key constructs of perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS), which are identified as antecedent conditions (Saks, 2006). POS and PSS have been shown to be statistically related to measures of *psychological safety*, as well as to job characteristics of openness, being encouraged to try new things, and enjoying a supportive relationship with supervisor and colleagues (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), resulting in the outcome of having “high quality relationships.” But this begs the question of what types of variables these really are: Is *perceived safety* not a response to antecedent conditions? Are POS and PSS themselves not psychological feeling states evoked by conditions? As such, we would argue that these constructs play multiple roles and defy being hard-coded into any one phase of the S-O-R process; it might be more accurate to think about them as multiple feedback loops. The example of *perceived caring by the employer*, a form of POS, is no trivial matter: As reported by Saks (2006), “demonstrating caring and support” is far and away the biggest predictor of both job and organizational engagement. But it’s not clear if *perceived caring* is part of the psychological response that defines engagement itself, or if it should be considered an antecedent condition, or even an outcome.

Unfortunately, this sort of conceptual “slipperiness” (Macey & Schneider, 2008) affects nearly every construct in the employee engagement literature: Is *task variety* purely an antecedent condition (an attribute of an environmental stimulus), or does task variety *necessitate* absorption (a definition of engagement; mediator variable) on the part of the employee in order to successfully perform the role, and by so doing,

<sup>2</sup> This is quite apart from other basic problems of determining causation in social science in the absence of longitudinal and experimental research designs.

does it necessarily *induce* role expansion (a behavioral outcome variable)?<sup>3</sup> In this light, it is easy to see how the slipperiness of constructs permits them to migrate back and forth in status from stimulus to psychological mediator to behavioral outcome.

Despite valiant past attempts to categorize these constructs as one of the three elements in the S-O-R model, it is our contention that a more fruitful approach might be found in allowing for multiple causal relations and feedback loops beyond the rigid S-O-R assumption. As we will argue below, the vast majority of engagement constructs can be considered to act as psychological mediators, specifically, *motivations*, which direct the organism to seek out certain kinds of stimuli (S), generate emotional experiences (O), and prepare the body for response (R).

Motivations are inherently *dynamic*, that is, they pertain to striving for change over time from current conditions to an improved future state. Because of this dynamism, we suggest that a better model than S-O-R may be found in Maruyama's (1963) *Second Cybernetics* model of deviation-amplifying mutual causal processes. In contrast to standard thermostat-like cybernetic systems that characterize most homeostatic systems, using negative feedback loops to keep conditions within certain bounds, deviation-amplifying processes push conditions toward increasing rates of change (e.g., a crack in the sidewalk fills with water; it freezes causing the crack to expand, which then holds more water, causing further expansion, and so on). Motives become actualized within the context of particular workplaces; the resulting direction of change is a function of mutually causal interactions between initial predispositions, e.g., the worker grew up in a success-oriented family vs. in an egalitarian commune, and work conditions that amplify certain types of needs, e.g., a sales department that closely tracks and rewards individual achievement vs. a non-profit with a culture of communalism. These interactions and their feedback loops naturally spawn increasing rates of change, which can either deepen a worker's commitment to their organization or drive them out. Our contention is that deviation-amplification is an important underlying force that impels microgenesis from starting conditions to strivings for change, and from foundational forms of motivation (e.g., the need for safety or autonomy) to higher, decentralized forms of motivation (e.g., the need for esteem or higher purpose).

### **Do Engagement Concepts Refer to Affect, Cognition, or Behavior?**

A very similar and related problem plagues attempts to separate constructs as primarily cognitive, emotional, or behavioral. The dominant definitions of employee engagement have gone to great pains to explicitly state that this construct is a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral complex. Commitment to the organization, for example, is defined as having both intellectual and emotional components (Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006; Shaw, 2005). Psychological presence is defined as being present cognitively, emotionally, and physically (Kahn, 1990). The authors of the popular

<sup>3</sup> To further complicate matters, direct perception theorists might suggest that antecedents aren't always "ordinary" stimuli, i.e., neutral objects, but are often special stimuli with inherent affordance values, i.e., stimuli that by their very nature afford certain kinds of interactions, the way a comfortable chair affords "sittability." In this view, an antecedent like task variety could afford (induce) task and role expansion, for example.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) have defined engagement as a “persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state” (p. 74; Schaufeli et al., 2002). These approaches pay lip service to this distinction but essentially finesse the problem. By fudging and blurring any real distinctions between the affective, cognitive, and conative, researchers are left without critical guidance for developing valid and reliable measures. Macey & Schneider (2008) express concern particularly about the inability of current measures to address the emotional component, which they see as essential to the distinctive definition of employee engagement.

Certain components of engagement have been identified as primarily cognitive, e.g., *attention*, which is defined as both *cognitive availability* and *time spent thinking about role* (Rothbard, 2001). In UWES terms, *absorption*, being intensely engrossed in one’s role (Rothbard, 2001; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002) seems like a primarily cognitive construct, whereas *vigor* (full of energy) seems more behavioral. The final component of UWES, *dedication*, seems primarily grounded in cognition with shades of affect (e.g., “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose”; “My job inspires me”; “My job is challenging”).

Just like the difficulties in establishing their S-O-R designations, these concepts defy easy classification as thoughts, feelings, or actions. Mirroring the consensus definition of the *attitude* construct in social psychology as having components of affect, cognition, and behavior (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996), we contend that the vast majority of these constructs imply thoughts, actions, and feelings, with a particular emphasis on the latter (Macey & Schneider, 2008). As demonstrated below, the concept of *motivation*, like *attitude*, can encompass this triad.

## Literature Review

In accordance with Templier and Paré (2018), a literature review of the theory development type was conducted consistent with the six-step process outlined by these authors: (1) problem formulation, (2) literature search, (3) screening for inclusion, (4) quality assessment, (5) data extraction, and (6) data analysis and interpretation, as follows:

- (1) The primary goal of this review is to identify theoretical systems that purport to define the components of employee engagement.
- (2) The literature search was performed using multiple, iterative search strategies beginning with consultation of the Web of Science and Google Scholar search engines, using combination of keywords drawn from definitions of engagement such as “engagement,” “motivation,” “striving,” “involvement,” “persistence,” “commitment,” “absorption,” “dedication,” “vigor,” “performance,” “citizenship,” “identification,” in conjunction with the object of these descriptors: “employee,” “worker,” “work,” “task,” “job,” “team,” “group,” “organization,” etc. As relevant papers were identified, the list of search terms was updated to include additional terms. Further, backward and forward searches on relevant papers permitted the discovery of additional materials.
- (3) The searches described above resulted in millions of publications of multiple types, which were further screened for inclusion. Screening criteria focused

on the presence of a comprehensive model of engagement, whether viewed through the lens of management, psychology, human resources, or assessment. Additionally, results were screened for the availability of a complete set of assessment items that corresponded to each comprehensive model. These screens reduced the set to roughly 40 publications.

(4) At this point, the full set of publications were reviewed for quality and relevance, resulting in additional forward and backward searching, which revealed a final set of conceptual models that conformed to the above requirements.

(5) The specific elements of each model were extracted into a table for direct comparison (Tables 3–5).

(6) The analysis and implications are presented below.

The analysis resulted in the identification of 102 concepts (Table 4) and 120 individual assessment items (Table 5) referenced in the seminal and review papers on employee engagement. The concepts range widely across multiple dimensions that have been identified in past reviews, namely, antecedent conditions; indicators of engagement itself (cognitions, emotions, behaviors); observable outcomes of engagement; traits; and higher order qualities of engagement (e.g., persistence over time). These 102 concepts also vary broadly in terms of their content, encompassing job characteristics (e.g., variety, challenge, enrichment); individual traits (e.g., conscientiousness, autotelic personality, locus of control); intrapsychic concerns related to the self (e.g., psychological safety, authenticity, opportunities for personal growth); relations with the material world of work (e.g., autonomy, absorption, opportunity to meaningfully contribute); social cognitions, emotions, and motivations (e.g., sense of belonging, demonstrations of caring, opportunities for recognition); and concerns with higher-order, abstract principles (e.g., justice, values, purpose).

### Emergent Points of Consensus

Since several literature reviews and meta-analyses of this literature have been conducted recently, we will not repeat the cataloguing of papers by commonalities here. Instead, we will use the points of consensus as a starting point for our main contention, which is that employee engagement is best conceived as human motivation, and that the various constructs proposed all neatly fit into a structured taxonomy of human motivation.

Across the papers reviewed, several points of consensus emerge:

1. Engagement is primarily considered to be an *individual*-level, not group-level, construct; as such, group level effects are the aggregated result of individual results (Shuck et al., 2017; Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2016; Shuck & Wollard, 2010).
2. Engagement is a *latent* psychological variable and therefore can be estimated but never directly observed, having the effect of re-classifying all so-called behavioral engagement constructs as outcomes (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey et al., 2009)

3. Engagement acts primarily as a *mediator* variable between antecedents (e.g., job characteristics, work conditions, etc.) and outcomes (e.g., intention to quit, productivity, performance; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Christian et al., 2011; Shuck, 2011; Rich et al., 2010; Bakker & Bal, 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey et al., 2009; Saks, 2006; Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).
4. Engagement is primarily conceived of as a *state* rather than a trait (Shuck et al., 2017; Christian et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2014).
5. Engagement is a multi-dimensional construct (“a complex nomological network”, Macey & Schneider, 2008) that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, but is primarily considered *affective* (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Soane et al., 2012; Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey et al., 2009; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990).
6. Engagement is primarily conceived of as an affectively-charged goal-directed state, which is typically referred to as *motivation* in the psychological literature, and is explicitly labeled as *motivation* in many seminal works (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Soane et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey et al., 2009; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017, 2018; Bakker et al., 2016; Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Kahn, 1990).
7. Repeated calls have been made to address the problem of non-parsimonious construct proliferation, and for conceptual development to address questions of nomological validity in the hopes of identifying a “super-engagement construct” that can integrate the disparate and growing collection of constructs (Albrecht, 2010; Shuck et al., 2017; Cole et al., 2012; Shuck, 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey et al., 2009).

### Why Motivation?

It's no coincidence that the major definitions of the employee engagement construct, despite their widely ranging theoretical origins, happen to fall perfectly in line with the definition of motivation, given by Pincus (2004) as *an individual-level, unobservable state of emotion or desire operating on the will and, as a psychological mediator, causing it to act*. We contend that this is because the concept of engagement is identical to the concept of motivation, albeit applied to a particular area of application, i.e., one's work. The goal of this paper is to suggest that a conceptual model already exists that can accommodate all of these concepts, and that splitting hairs over which aspects of which concepts are antecedents, mediators, or consequences, is much like trying to parse out which are cognitions, emotions, or behavioral inclinations. From a motivational perspective, these concepts each have facets in all of these readout channels, i.e., a single motivational construct, say the need for *belonging*, can be fostered by certain conditions, can become a salient need, is experienced both affectively and cognitively, and can be behaviorally expressed.

In their seminal review article, Macey & Schneider (2008) explicitly describe employee engagement as a form of *motivation*, and report the widespread usage of synonyms for motivation in the literature including an “illusive force that motivates employees” (Wellins & Concelman, 2005) and a “high internal motivational state”



**Table 1** Definitional Characteristics of Employee Engagement and Human Motivation

| Consensus Definition   | Employee Engagement | Human Motivation |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
| Construct is defined as an <i>individual</i> -level, not group-level, psychological construct  | •                   | •                |
| Construct is a <i>latent</i> variable that is not directly observable  | •                   | •                |
| Construct acts as a <i>mediator</i> variable between antecedent conditions and behavioral outcomes   | •                   | •                |
| Construct is conceived of primarily as a <i>state</i> rather than a trait  | •                   | •                |
| Construct is conceived of as being multi-dimensional, with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, but is considered to be primarily <i>affective</i> | •                   | •                |
| Construct is defined as an affectively-charged goal-directed state, and often explicitly labeled as <i>motivation</i>  | •                   | •                |

(Colbert et al., 2004). Shuck's (2011) integrative literature review offers a very similar definition of employee engagement "as a positive psychological state of motivation with behavioral manifestations." (p. 2). Macey & Schneider (2008) make an intriguing statement that explicitly supports our contention:

"Some readers may feel that there are clear hints of 'motivation' in what we have just written and wonder to themselves why we are not saying that this (employee engagement) is motivation. The answer is that the construct of motivation is itself a hypothetical construct with considerable ambiguity surrounding it. Were we to introduce it here, it might further confound the issues so we leave the chore of integrating engagement with 'motivation' to others." (p. 4).

Suffice it to say, we accept this challenge. In surveying the literature, the attributes that consistently define the concept of employee engagement equally define motivation. Motivation is the meta-theory the field has been calling for (Table 1).

A leading comprehensive theory of motivation is Buck's (1985) PRIME Theory, an acronym for Primary Motivational and Emotional Systems. The key premise is that motivation is a state of pent-up potential energy that, when actualized, is "read out" through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral systems. In this model, each of these three readouts have distinct functions: the function of syncretic cognition is to provide the opportunity for conscious self-regulation; emotional expression serves to spontaneously communicate what one is feeling to others, which supports social coordination; and physical responses serve the need for adaptive behavior. The consensus view of engagement follows this same exact pattern of cognition (e.g., enthusiastic thinking), emotion (e.g., felt pleasantness), and behavior (e.g., physical activation).

The dominant perspective on the origin of motivations, echoed by Buck (1985) and Damasio (2012), is that they are essentially mechanisms of homeostasis, keeping the organism within set bounds of desirable operation. Motivational and emotional processes are activated within individuals via stereotyped action patterns, which have existed long before evolution designed conscious minds. In Damasio's view, humans have minds for the purpose of sensing changes in our physiological states both internally and externally, and consciousness exists to provide us flexibility in how to respond to our environments. In this view, higher-order motivations (e.g., to

feel free, included, cared for, fair, etc.) are built up (ontogenetically, phylogenetically, and microgenetically) from the neural substrates of unconscious, physiological needs on a continuum that begins with the physiologically-grounded (e.g., feeling safe) and extending up to those that are increasingly influenced and shaped by culture (e.g., feeling respected, successful, ethical, self-actualized, and having a life purpose). As motives become more culturally mediated (i.e., developing socio-historically), they are also increasingly subject to cultural prescription of appropriate avenues for their fulfillment. As suggested by Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1978), the microgenesis of personality and self-concept, as amalgamations of sets of needs and need-traits, is heavily determined by the *social environments* provided by caregivers, family, school, etc.

Consistent with the operation of all four of Vygotsky's levels of human development, it is through the experience of deficiencies that development proceeds. Accordingly, we would expect hierarchical progress in motivation to typically occur in response to negative motivation, at least initially; over time, the role of positive aspirations would gain more prominence. As noted by cultural psychologists, negative and positive motivations tend to work together in a *complementary* fashion (Valsiner, 2014, 2019, 2021). Boredom, as an example of a negative motivational nudge, initiates stimulation seeking and desire for flow experiences; in this view, a certain degree of boredom is necessary to spark creativity and innovation (Boesch, 1998).

### Applying a Taxonomy of Human Motivation to Engagement Constructs

Recently, a unified model of human motivation has been introduced to describe the types of emotional needs that impel humans to take action (Pincus, 2022). It was necessary to develop this model because, surprisingly, despite a plethora of mini-theories of motivation (e.g., Need for Achievement, Need for Affiliation, Terror Management Theory, Flow Theory, etc.), no comprehensive model of human motivation yet existed in the psychology literature. Maslow's need hierarchy makes strides toward being more comprehensive, yet his focus on high achieving individuals led him to neglect many key motivations recognized in the literature, such as the need for Nurture identified by Bowlby and Harlow, McClelland's Need for Achievement and Need for Power, Erickson's Identity Formation motive, and Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory, among others.

To address this need, we began with the premise that motivation activates and directs behavior toward goals in four fundamental domains of life: the intrapsychic (inner-directed, focused on the self), the instrumental (outer-directed, focused on the material world of work and play), the interpersonal (socially-directed), and the spiritual (directed toward adherence with transcendent and eternal principles). These four domains of motivational focus have been identified by multiple systems of thought (Pincus, 2022) including developmental psychology (e.g., James, Maslow, and Kohlberg), sports psychology, social psychology & philosophy of religion, and by the five major world religions. We followed the premise of four fundamental motivational domains with a typology of three possible levels of motivational fulfillment. Following the work of Fromm (2013) and Rand (1993), we proposed that these four domains of fulfillment cross three states of existence: a foundational level of forward-looking

**Table 2** A unified pyramid of human motivation (Pincus, 2022)

| Three Levels of Striving | Four Life Domains                   |                             |                         |                                |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                          | Self                                | Material                    | Social                  | Spiritual                      |
| Aspirational             | Fulfilling Potential and Limitation | Success and Failure         | Recognition and Scorn   | Higher Purpose and Materialism |
| Experiential             | Authenticity and Conformity         | Immersion and Boredom       | Caring and Uncaring     | Ethics and Wrongdoing          |
| Foundational             | Safety and Anxiety                  | Autonomy and Disempowerment | Inclusion and Exclusion | Justice and Injustice          |

expectations (*being*), an intermediate level of experiences in the moment (*doing*), and an advanced level of backward-looking outcomes (*having*).<sup>4</sup> Crossing the four life domains with the three modes of existence results in a periodic table-style matrix that is arguably comprehensive since there are no additional fundamental domains of life or modes of existence. This matrix is presented below as Table 2, along with the resulting distributions of concepts and assessment items (Table 3) analyzed as part of the literature review.

As suggested above, the columns of the model organize the motivational concepts in terms of the location of the desired change (change in feelings about the self; change in feelings about action in the material world, change in feelings about social relationships and social interactions; and change in feelings about relationships with transcendental, ethereal principles) and the rows of this table organize motivational concepts according to the types of change toward which a particular motivational force is striving (change in expectations for the future, change in real time experiences of the present, and change in retrospective evaluation of outcomes from life choices and activities). Each motivational concept in the matrix has both positive (aspiration-linked) and negative (frustration-linked) emotional forms—reflecting the push and pull of emotional energies that move people to take action in life.<sup>5</sup> Motivational energy is typically fueled by both positive “pull” and negative “push” forces for the same need; for example, a worker who feels disempowered strives to rid himself or herself of this feeling (negative), typically by seeking greater autonomy (positive). In this way, positive and negative motivational forces should be seen as *complementary*, not as zero-sum tradeoffs.

Another important postulate of this model, like that of Maslow’s need hierarchy, is that progress within any of the life domains requires the successful satisfaction

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle proposed the same three-level delineation between states of existence: potentiality (having potential), energy or potentiality-as-such (motion that makes use of that latent potential), and actuality (the finished product). The classic example of this distinction involves the building of a house. The building materials could be used to build a house or they could be used to build some other structure; this is their state of potentiality, what Aristotle called “the buildable.” The motion of building the house brings the materials toward the goal of actualization as a house but is an intermediate step in the process; this is the state of energy or potentiality-as-such. When the house is finished, the building materials are in a state of actualization.

<sup>5</sup> Since it is logically possible for an employee to be motivated by either the positive aspiration for a motive or to avoid the negative frustration of the same motive, or both, or neither, we make no prediction about the expected relationships between positive and negative manifestations, and propose instead that they tend to operate in a *complementary* manner.

**Table 3** Distributions of engagement concepts and assessment items by the twelve cells of the unified pyramid of human motivation

| Three Levels of Striving   | Four Life Domains                   |                             |                         |                                |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                            | Self                                | Material                    | Social                  | Spiritual                      |
| Aspirational               | Fulfilling Potential and Limitation | Success and Failure         | Recognition and Scorn   | Higher Purpose and Materialism |
| % of qualifying constructs | 7.8%                                | 5.2%                        | 2.6%                    | 7.8%                           |
| % of qualifying items      | 3.6%                                | 5.5%                        | 4.5%                    | 3.6%                           |
| Experiential               | Authenticity and Conformity         | Immersion and Boredom       | Caring and Uncaring     | Ethics and Wrongdoing          |
| % of qualifying constructs | 7.8%                                | 26.0%                       | 9.1%                    | 10.4%                          |
| % of qualifying items      | 3.6%                                | 38.2%                       | 8.2%                    | 10.0%                          |
| Foundational               | Safety and Anxiety                  | Autonomy and Disempowerment | Inclusion and Exclusion | Justice and Injustice          |
| % of qualifying constructs | 3.9%                                | 10.4%                       | 5.2%                    | 3.9%                           |
| % of qualifying items      | 0.9%                                | 2.7%                        | 9.1%                    | 10.0%                          |

of more basic needs before the next level becomes salient, e.g., before one can be concerned with living up to their full potential, they must already have achieved feelings of safety and authenticity. In our extensive review of the motivational literature, over 100 distinct motivational concepts (i.e., needs or drives) were identified; all fit within one of these twelve categories of motivation, supporting our contention that the matrix is comprehensive.

Although we have displayed the matrix as a flat table for the purposes of publication, we prefer a three-dimensional pyramidal structure to reinforce the notion that humans must start from the basic motivations within each of the four domains before ascending to the salience of higher motivations; consequently, progressively fewer humans attain the higher levels with each domain, shrinking their relative sizes toward the top as visually represented by a pyramid. Another important theoretical concept that is reinforced by a pyramid heuristic is the fact that the Self is proposed to be antipodal to the Social, and the Spiritual is proposed to be antipodal to the Material; we will return to this point later as it has implications for hypothesis generation.

Presuming that most readers are not yet familiar with this model, we will give a brief introduction to the twelve motives of this matrix, and relate certain key concepts from the employee engagement literature to each. In all, 77 of the 102 concepts identified in the literature review found homes in this matrix. The remaining 25 were primarily personality traits (i.e., ambitiousness, autotelic personality, confidence, conscientiousness, determination, exchange ideology, hardiness, initiative, locus of control, optimism, proactivity, self-efficacy, self-esteem/self-worth, trait positive affect). These were excluded on the basis that the consensus view holds that the engagement construct is a *state*, not a trait. Job characteristics were similarly excluded because they are not psychological states (i.e., feedback from task and oth-

ers, job and task characteristics, job enrichment, job demands, physical presence, and turnover intention). Finally, meta-characteristics that encompass multiple sub-dimensions were excluded because they are merely category labels whose subcomponents have already been included (i.e., personal resources, job resources, job satisfaction, motivation, and persistent/pervasive affective-cognitive state).

## Motives of the Self

**Safety and Anxiety.** At the most basic level, there is a human need to feel safe and secure. This means feeling safe and assured in the face of challenges. When safety motivation is operating there is a desire to gain the basic sense that one has the confidence, protection, and comfort to successfully grow as a person. The need for “peace of mind” captures the spirit of this motive. At least twelve major theories of motivation include a need for safety as a core motive (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

Fittingly, the very first academic paper that described the phenomenon of employee engagement by Kahn (1990) lists psychological safety as one of the three pillars of engagement. In their review of the literature, Saks & Gruman (2014) suggest that Kahn’s need for safety is indeed the most fundamental requirement for engagement, which they describe as “important and necessary for all types of engagement” to develop (p. 175). Additional engagement constructs that speak to this need include the need for physical health (Saks, 2006; Sonnentag, 2003) and trust (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

**Authenticity and Conformity.** At the next level, pertaining to experiences with and of the self, comes the human need to feel able to express one’s distinctive individuality in the face of pressures to conformity. This is the desire to gain the sense that one is different in a good way, and to use this difference to successfully take action toward desired results. “Know thyself” captures the spirit of this motive. At least nine major theories of motivation include a need for authenticity as a core motive (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

The essence of Kahn’s (1990) engagement construct is that true engagement requires the “holistic investment of the entire self” (p. 97), i.e., their full, true, and complete selves, to one’s work role. That the need for authenticity is built atop fulfilled needs for psychological safety seems logical and fitting. Additional engagement constructs that speak to this need include the need for authenticity (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; May et al., 2004; Kahn, 1990), emotional presence (Kahn, 1990), personal identification (Cole et al., 2012; Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bono & Judge, 2003; Kahn, 1990; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986), projection of the self into work & organization (Christian et al., 2011; Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1990), and role fit, i.e., the degree of match between the authentic self and one’s job and organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

**Fulfilling Potential and Failure to Thrive.** At the highest level of attainment in the domain of the Self we find the need for self-actualization, the need to feel as though one is progressing toward fulfilling their personal potential as a human. This is the desire to gain the sense that one has the skill and mastery to successfully become one’s “best self.” The expression, “Be all that you can be,” captures the spirit

of this motive. At least eleven major theories of motivation include a striving toward one's full potential as a core motive (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

This motive has found full expression in the recent literature on *thriving at work* (Spreitzer et al., 2005; van der Walt, 2018), which is defined as a “sense of progress, or forward movement, in one's self-development” (p. 4). Several related constructs in the engagement literature speak to this need for personal growth and mastery including strivings for extra role behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), role expansion (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Morgeson et al., 2005), mastery, learning, development and personal growth (Crawford et al., 2010), opportunities for growth & development (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Harter et al., 2002), as well as desires to innovate (Macey & Schneider, 2008). The construct of initiative (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Frese & Fay, 2001), when applied within the domain of the Self, may fuel all of these strivings.

### Motives of the Material Domain

**Autonomy and Disempowerment.** At the most basic level of the Material domain, the area of life most directly associated with work, is the need for autonomy, defined as the need to feel authorized, capable and competent in the face of challenge. Autonomy is the desire to gain the basic sense that one has the ability, resources, and authority to successfully take action toward a desired result. The expression, “You can do it,” captures the spirit of this motive. At least seven major theories of motivation include a striving for autonomy, including terms such as self-determination, empowerment, and self-efficacy (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

A variety of engagement-related constructs explicitly focus on the need for autonomy (Soane et al., 2012; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001). Other related psychological concepts include competence (Soane et al., 2012; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995), control (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995), empowerment (Macey & Schneider, 2008), personal discretion/agency (Kahn, 1990), and self-determination (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Meyer & Gagné, 2008). We would also classify *personal resources* in this category, such as positive anticipation of future behavior and mental and physical resilience. There is a set of antecedent conditions that can help make these strivings successful including resource availability (Shuck, 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Harter et al., 2002; Maslach et al., 2001) and sustainable workload (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001), among other task characteristics.

**Immersion and Boredom.** At the intermediate, experiential level of the Material domain, we find the need for immersion, the striving to feel fully focused and engaged in the moment. This desire to lose one's self in activity, in a state of total awareness, absorption, and flow, plays a particularly prominent role in definitions of engagement. The expression, “Being in the zone,” captures the essence of this motive. No less than thirteen major systems of motivation include this motive (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

Of all the motives discussed herein, immersion is the motive most densely populated by engagement constructs, representing roughly one-quarter of the 102 identified in the literature review. Chief among these is absorption (Kahn, 1990; Saks &

Gruman, 2014; Rothbard, 2001; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Hooker & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), one of the three pillars of the dominant Schaufeli-Bakker UWES paradigm and a hallmark of Kahn's (1990) concept of engagement. As pointed out by Saks & Gruman (2014), "if there is one common component across all definitions of engagement, it is the notion of being absorbed in one's work and role" (p. 166). Unsurprisingly, then, there are many different terms used to describe this construct and these tend toward either cognitive, emotional, or behavioral descriptors.

The cognitive forms of this state include attention (Rothbard, 2001; Kahn, 1990), psychological availability (Kahn, 1990), cognitive presence (Kahn, 1990; Christian et al., 2011), experiential quality of doing work (Kahn, 1990), focused effort (Macey & Schneider, 2008), and job involvement (Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; May et al., 2004; Maslach et al., 2001). The affective forms of this state draw a variety of labels including passion (Zigarmi et al., 2009; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Wellins & Concelman, 2005), enjoyment (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003), happiness (Schaufeli et al., 2002), energy or energetic state (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, 2017, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001), enthusiasm (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, 2017, 2018; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Harter et al., 2003, 2002), and positive affect (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Sonnentag, 2003; Kahn, 1990). The behavioral descriptors of this state include efficacy (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001), productivity (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Harter et al., 2002), vigor (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shirom, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002), and the display of discretionary effort (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Frank et al., 2004; Mowday et al., 1982). As predicted by Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory (2003), antecedent stimulus conditions that help elicit this state include an optimal level of challenge (Shuck, 2011; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

**Success and Failure.** At the highest level of attainment in the Material domain we find successful accomplishment, the striving to feel a sense of achievement as a result of one's effort. This motive represents the desire to contribute to and be victorious in attaining desired results and to experience material rewards as a result. The expression, "In it to win it," captures the spirit of this motive. At least seven major psychological theories of motivation include this motive (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

Within the engagement literature, this motive tends to be relegated to the status of evaluative outcome variable, as job performance (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) or individual performance (Christian, et al., 2011; Alfes et al., 2010; Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009). Nevertheless, several key papers include either the striving to make important contributions (Shuck, 2011; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Hackman & Oldham, 1980) or the striving to have impact (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995), both of which are well aligned with this need.

## Motives of the Social Domain

**Inclusion and Exclusion.** At the foundational level of the social sphere is the need for acceptance and inclusion that permits the establishment of social bonds. Inclusion means feeling socially accepted, connected, and integrated, the desire to gain

the basic sense that one belongs and can develop social attachments and friendships. The expression, “We are family,” captures this spirit. At least nine major motivational systems include this motive, which has been similarly labeled the need for affiliation, sociability, belonging, or social contact (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

Within the engagement literature, this motive figures prominently, with increased attention from the UK-based research group of Bailey (Truss), Soane, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, who have raised its profile substantially by naming it one of the three pillars of their Intellectual-Social-Affective (ISA) engagement concept (Bailey et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2017; Soane et al., 2012). Although this is a new level of prominence for the construct, it has been a part of the engagement literature for many years, showing up as belonging (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982), high quality relationships (Saks, 2006), the ability to show warmth to others (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shirom, 2003), and social relatedness (Soane et al., 2012; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Kahn, 1990).

**Caring and Uncaring.** At the intermediate, experiential level of the Social triad comes the experience of feeling cared for by one’s employer, supervisor, or colleagues. Caring means feeling able to give and receive (appropriate) love, nurturance, and support, the desire to feel emotional nourishment, empathy, devotion, and experience mutual gratitude. The expression “Sharing is caring” aptly captures its essence. At least eight major motivational systems include this motive, which has been similarly labeled the need for nurturance, intimacy, succorance, attachment, or parental love (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

Feeling cared for is an especially important construct within the engagement literature due to its predictive power; Saks (2006) reports that perceived organizational support is far and away the top predictor of engagement with the organization and is tied for first place with job characteristics as the top predictor of job engagement. This construct goes by many names including caring, concern, and support (Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1992), community & social support (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001), manager support (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Harter et al., 2002), perceived organizational support (Saks, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2001), perceived supervisor support (Saks, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2001), social support (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Maslach et al., 2001), and supportive supervisors & management (Shuck, 2011; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

**Recognition and Indifference.** At the pinnacle of the Social triad is the need for social recognition. Recognition means feeling that one has achieved a social status of being admired, respected, and esteemed, typically as a resident expert in some skill or ability in the context of work. This motive represents the desire to gain social acknowledgement that one has been successful in a socially significant pursuit. The expression, “Hats off to you,” captures the spirit of this motive. At least eight major motivational systems include this motive, which has been similarly labeled the needs for esteem, honor, or egoistic prosocial motivation (Forbes, 2011; Pincus, 2022).

Surprisingly, the need for recognition barely registers in the engagement literature with only two constructs matching this description. Significantly, however, the few times this concept surfaces, it appears in seminal papers (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001), suggesting that recognition needs should



be seriously considered as components of engagement. The first of these is the rewards & recognition construct (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001), specifically the *recognition* component; the *reward* construct would generally be classified with the successful accomplishment motive by motivational theorists. The other construct is that of the need for pride (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Mowday et al., 1982), the desire for a kind of social “badge value” or caché associated with prominent, successful organizations.

## Motives of the Spiritual Domain

**Fairness and Injustice.** At the basic level of the Spiritual triad is the need for justice and fairness, the need to feel that one’s organization acts in an honest, unbiased, impartial, even-handed and transparent manner. In practice, this means the employees strive to feel the basic sense that good is rewarded, bad is punished, and that gain goes to those most deserving of it. The spirit of this motive is captured by the expression, “If you want peace, work for justice.” We note parenthetically that the importance of this motive has recently been dramatically underscored by the Black Lives Matter movement and perceived corporate responses to COVID-19. We suggest that to the extent that needs for justice have not been incorporated into engagement constructs, it has been an oversight that should be corrected. This motive appears in many motivational systems, particularly those focusing on moral development in children (e.g., Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, Lerner’s just world hypothesis, Bloom’s roots of good and evil, etc.; Pincus 2022).

Here, again, is an example of a need that has received scant notice in the engagement literature, but when it is mentioned, it is in some of the most significant papers in the body of work (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Both Saks (2006) and Maslach et al. (2001) identify the important role of perceived fairness, and procedural and distributive fairness as antecedent conditions for fostering engagement. Saks (2006) assesses the power of a host of variables in predicting both job engagement and organization engagement; of these, procedural justice is one of only two significant predictors of organizational engagement.

**Ethics and Wrongdoing.** At the intermediate, experiential level comes the need to feel that one and one’s organization behaves in an ethical manner, consistent with normative moral values. This is the striving to feel that one’s actions, and those of one’s organization, are in accordance with a set of moral principles, universal values, or at the very least, accepted standard business practices, applied to the business in which you are engaged. This is the desire to feel that one’s and one’s organization act in accordance with principled best practices and the highest ethical standards, something that is universally preached in corporate values statements but too often ignored in practice. The essence of this need is captured by the expression, “Do the right thing.” This motive similarly appears in motivational systems that focus on moral development including those of Kohlberg, Batson, Staub, and even Kant (Pincus, 2022).

Ethical motivation receives a great deal of attention in the engagement literature, in the form of the many constructs devoted to reciprocity, obligation, duty, loyalty, and the like. At the individual level, this adherence to principle includes the sense of

personal dedication and duty toward the organization. Chief among these may be the concept of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) directed to other individuals or to the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Lee & Allen, 2002), organizational commitment behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Robinson et al., 2004; Rhoades et al., 2001), emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Saks, 2006; Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006; Shaw, 2005; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), mutual commitments (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), dedication (Shuck, 2011; Thomas, 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2002), loyalty (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), and values (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001). Because these constructs have nearly all been defined in terms of observable behaviors, as a group they have tended to be categorized as outcomes or consequences of engagement rather than engagement itself, which misses the point of their *motivational* status. When an employee experiences ethical strivings (as motivation), they may tilt toward demonstrating observable citizenship behaviors (as part of the readout of that motivation), but it is important to recognize the motivation itself as the cause of that behavior.

**Higher Purpose and Materialism.** At the peak of the Spiritual domain stands the noblest and rarest of the motives, the need to feel as though one is serving a higher purpose or calling through one's effort. Higher purpose means having a more meaningful reason to live, work, and exist than satisfying material needs. This is the desire to transcend the ordinary limitations of everyday life toward a higher, even spiritual, purpose. An expression that captures its essence is, "Those who have a *why* to live can bear almost any *how*." An impressive collection of motivational theorists explicitly include a form of higher purpose or transcendental motivation in their systems including Staub, Kohlberg, and Maslow (Pincus, 2022).

Similar to the ethical motivation, the need for higher purpose is very well established in the engagement literature with extensive references to the construct of the meaningfulness of work, both *in* one's work and *at* one's work (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014; James et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995). Of particular note is research focused explicitly on spiritual needs and their relationship to employee engagement (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Houghton et al., 2016; Milliman et al., 2018; Saks, 2011; van der Walt, 2018). These spiritual needs have been described as a need for meaning and purpose, awareness of life, connectedness, experience of sacredness, personal reflection and growth, health and inner peace, and compassion (van der Walt, 2018). Closely related constructs include organizational purpose (Macey & Schneider, 2008), sense of purpose (Macey & Schneider, 2008), transformational leadership, which is thought of as a catalyst for meaning and purpose (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Bakker et al., 2011; Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008), and adaptive behavior, which represents individual strivings in support of the organization's purpose (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

## Implications for Theory

The persistent problem of adequately defining employee engagement is well documented (Shuck et al., 2017; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Macey & Schneider, 2008). As

perceptively noted by Macey & Schneider (2008), trying to separate antecedents and consequences from an ill-defined mediating construct is, at best, a “slippery” business (p. 10). By failing to embed the phenomena of engagement within a clear theoretical model, the field has suffered from concept proliferation, as indicated by the more than 100 identified herein. This is a failure of parsimony, but more fundamentally, it is a failure to clearly state the essential character of the phenomenon itself. Across the literature there are precious few citations of the psychological literature on motivation, which is extensive. It is telling that Kahn (1990), in the paper that first defined this construct, employs Maslow’s (1970) need hierarchy as one of its primary foundations. Despite the grounding of the original concept in motivation theory, the only consistent acknowledgements to the psychological literature involve passing references to self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

One of the most significant benefits to theory development of our proposition is to embed the vast array of engagement concepts within a structure that is logical and arguably comprehensive, as there are no known additional domains of human life or modes of existence (Fromm, 2013; Rand, 1993). Knowing these limits directly addresses the call to end concept proliferation (Cole et al., 2012), since any new construct proposed will necessarily have a “home” among similar constructs.

Another important benefit is immediately obvious from our analysis of Tables 3 and 4 as one can immediately see the degree of conceptual overlap, and distinctiveness, between different theoretical streams. As noted, fully one quarter of the concepts, and nearly two in five assessment items, identified relate to the motivational construct of *immersion*, suggesting that this is the most defining characteristic of employee engagement. By the same token, underrepresented concepts can also be clearly identified, e.g., *safety, authenticity, recognition, justice*, and included in future research.

Another key feature of our model is the requirement that each motivation must be capable of operating as either a striving toward positive aspiration (i.e., promotion) or away from negative frustration (i.e., prevention). Explicitly recognizing the polarity of motives within each cell supports further logical organization of proposed facilitative or inhibitory concepts, and, indeed, suggests that future research assess each of the twelve motives in terms of promotion needs and prevention needs.

However, we believe the greatest contribution to theory development is the establishment of a general theory of employee engagement that is composed of every possible human motivation (Pincus, 2022). Our model of human motivation takes the form of a pyramid formed by four sides representing four life domains: the Self, the Material, the Social, and the Spiritual. By placing these domains as opposing pairs, Self and Social, and Material and Spiritual, via a visual metaphor of distance, we are suggesting strong linkages between adjacent domains (e.g., Self – Spiritual – Social), and weak linkages for antipodal domains, for which there exists strong theoretical (Kohlberg and Power, 1981; Staub, 2005) and empirical support (Mahoney, et al., 2005).

A next frontier for research will be to describe the manner in which discrete motivations (both positive and negative) interact with each other to spark developmental progression both at the individual level and at the level of the organization. Our

pyramidal model posits that such progress necessarily moves individuals and organizations in the direction of transcendence of categorical boundaries, with the ultimate goal of unifying all twelve motivations, i.e., what gives me security also provides justice for others, what gives me a sense of achievement also brings honor to the organization, what gives me a sense of authenticity also brings me a sense of purpose, etc.

### Implications for Methods

In the words of Shuck et al. (2017), “the lack of engagement measures that are both academically grounded as well as practically useful, ...complicates the ability of researchers to answer scholarly inquiry around questions of nomological validity and structural stability matched with practical usability” (p. 15). A symptom of flawed measures, the products of flawed theories, is the failure to garner empirical support for tested hypotheses, and the literature is rife with examples. Shuck (2011) cites Rich et al.’s (2010) finding that one operationalization of engagement failed to explain any variance in outcomes beyond that explained by intrinsic motivation, job involvement, and job satisfaction, suggesting that this concept and its operationalization was incomplete and “in need of theory building.” Similarly, Shuck (2010) found that Kahn’s definition of engagement failed to predict unique variance in outcomes, whereas a set of non-engagement variables were successful in explaining variance.

In the same spirit, Macey & Schneider (2008) called for a fundamental re-thinking of the approach to measurement. In their view, an adequate measurement technique is needed that can validly and reliably measure the motivational-emotional content of these constructs while minimizing rational filtering of response. In the words of Macey & Schneider (2008):

- “The results from survey data are used to infer that reports of these conditions signify engagement, but the state of engagement itself is not assessed.” (p. 7). And current measures “do not directly tap engagement. Such measures require an inferential leap to engagement rather than assessing engagement itself.” (p. 8).
- “Some measures...used to infer engagement are not affective in nature at all and frequently do not connote or even apply to a sense of energy...” (p. 10). “Measures of psychological states that are devoid of direct and explicit indicators of affective and energetic feeling are not measures of state engagement in whole or part.” (p. 12).
- “The conclusion from these articles is to focus the measurement on the construct of interest; if engagement is the target, ensure that the measure maps the content of the construct.” (p. 26).

We couldn’t agree more, and our proposed reconceptualization of employee engagement has clear implications for advancing measurement. If employee engagement is indeed a *motivational-emotional* construct, then attempting to assess it using verbal and numerical assessment items is immediately problematic because such measures require rational, analytical thought on the part of the respondent. Entire research streams have evolved in the decades since Kahn (1990) specifically to work around the problems of assessing emotional and experiential constructs. These include a

variety of so-called “System 1” techniques, named for Daniel Kahneman’s (2011) distinction between the brain’s fast, intuitive system (System 1) and the slower, rational system (System 2). These measurement systems are designed to bypass rational, cognitive filters, so that researchers can directly access motivational-emotional states, and include neurological imaging and electrical techniques (e.g., fMRI, EEG), physiological techniques (e.g., facial electromyography, facial coding, electro-dermal response, pupillary dilation, eye tracking, heart rate, blood pressure, respiration), and indirect measures of motivational-emotional meaning (e.g., Implicit Association Test, Affective Priming, Image-based Techniques). We urge scholars to move beyond cognitively-biased “paper and pencil” surveys when attempting to measure this motivational-emotional construct.

### Implications for Practice

Much of contemporary employee engagement theory has little to offer the current day practitioner due to the lack of coherent theory and, accordingly, the weak ability of measures derived from these theories to explain variance in important outcomes. By grounding the many concepts attendant to this construct within a unified theory of human motivation, the task of understanding and communicating its essence is greatly simplified. This alone should be very helpful to practitioners who must somehow explain what their models measure and why.

Beyond its heuristic value, a unified model of human motivation provides a series of testable hypotheses, which can illuminate the specific relationships between each of the twelve motives (and their promotion and prevention faces) and external conditions that are under the employer’s control, outcomes that are important to the client, and with each other that together give meaning to interventions within a particular cultural context. Knowing which of the twelve complementary motives are most salient within a particular cultural milieu can assist the organization and workers to address work-related issues contextually, situationally, and adaptively. The cultural meaning of negative emotional needs is especially important to understand: The drive to avoid failure would have an entirely different meaning in a learning culture that not only tolerates failure, but actively encourages it, as opposed to a culture where “failure is not an option.” By aligning motivational interventions with the deep currents of cultural context, such interventions can take on meanings that are harmonious and adaptive, not incongruent, or inappropriate.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in the words of social psychologist Kurt Lewin, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory.” The many challenges to the defensibility of the engagement construct can easily create points of friction for practitioners who have curious clients. Adopting a structured, holistic model with face validity should hold clear advantages for all parties by providing a common language and framework to house their concepts and items.

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<sup>6</sup> In a learning organization, failure-avoidant workers might be encouraged to use successive approximation or test-and-learn as more appropriate, culturally-consistent goals.

## Conclusion

In summary, this paper responds to repeated, urgent calls for integration of the diverse and proliferating concepts related to employee engagement. The subject of employee engagement is garnering unprecedented popularity (Shuck, 2011; Google Trends, 2020). Even in the best case, the current state of affairs means that theoretical disconnects slow progress in the field; in worse cases, it means that vast quantities of money and time are being directed to efforts that are poorly understood, leading to dangerous levels of waste that run the risk of poisoning the HRD field against a potentially valuable, even essential, concept.

As a final example of the utility of our model, we return to one of the many laments over the state of engagement theory and measurement. Shuck (2011) gives a series of examples of assessment items from different scales derived from multiple theoretical and measurement traditions that are seemingly impossible to reconcile within a single conceptual system:

- “...Treated (as if they) were impersonal objects” (*Uncaring*).
- “I can be myself at work” (*Authenticity*).
- “I am prepared to fully devote myself to performing my job duties” (*Ethics*).
- “I am bursting with energy” (*Immersion*).

These are widely disparate items, to be sure. However, as indicated in the parentheses, our model easily accommodates all of these perspectives, mini-theories, and concept within a single model, providing a kind of “unified field theory” of employee engagement. We contend that the secret to unlocking a meta-theory to encompass all of these perspectives, and all of the dimensions they propose, has always been hidden in plain sight within the very first descriptions of employee engagement.

## Appendix

**Table 4** Employee engagement concepts that conform to the consensus view

| Motivational matrix cell | Employee engagement concepts   | Antecedents | Cognitive | Emotional | Behavioral | Consequences |
|--------------------------|--|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| A1 Safety                | Physical health (Saks, 2006; Sonnentag, 2003)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| A1 Safety                | Safety (psychological; Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| A1 Safety                | Trust (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| A2 Authenticity          | Authenticity (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Rich et al., 2010; Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; May et al., 2004; Kahn, 1990) |             | •         | •         |            | •            |
| A2 Authenticity          | Emotional presence (Kahn, 1990)  |             |           | •         |            |              |
| A2 Authenticity          | Identification (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bono & Judge, 2003; Kahn, 1990; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986)                                   |             |           | •         |            |              |
| A2 Authenticity          | Personal identification (Cole et al., 2012; Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990)  |             | •         | •         |            | •            |
| A2 Authenticity          | Projection of self into work & organization (Christian et al., 2011; Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         | •         |            | •            |
| A2 Authenticity          | Role fit (Macey & Schneider, 2008)   |             |           |           |            |              |
| A3 Potential             | Extra role behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| A3 Potential             | Initiative (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Frese & Fay, 2001)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| A3 Potential             | Innovation (Macey & Schneider, 2008)   |             |           |           |            | •            |
| A3 Potential             | Mastery, learning, development and personal growth (Crawford et al., 2010)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| A3 Potential             | Opportunity for growth & development (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Harter et al., 2002)  |             | •         |           |            |              |
| A3 Potential             | Role expansion (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Morgeson et al., 2005)  |             |           |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Autonomy (Soane et al., 2012; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)   |             | •         |           |            | •            |
| B1 Autonomy              | Competence (Soane et al., 2012; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995)                                       |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Control (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Empowerment (Macey & Schneider, 2008)  |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Personal discretion (Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Resource availability (Shuck, 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Harter et al., 2002; Maslach et al., 2001)      |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Self-determination (control; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Meyer & Gagné, 2008)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B1 Autonomy              | Workload (sustainable; Saks 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)  |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption (Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Rothbard, 2001; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 2003)   |             | •         | •         |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Activation (Macey & Schneider, 2008)   |             |           |           |            | •            |
| B2 Immersion             | Attention (Rothbard, 2001; Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Availability (psychological; Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            |              |

**Table 4** (continued)

| Motivational matrix cell | Employee engagement concepts  | Antecedents | Cognitive | Emotional | Behavioral | Consequences |
|--------------------------|---|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| B2 Immersion             | Challenge (Shuck, 2011; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Hackman & Oldham, 1980)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Cognitive presence (Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Discretionary effort exhibited (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Frank et al., 2004; Mowday et al., 1982)   |             |           | •         | •          | •            |
| B2 Immersion             | Efficacy (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)  |             |           |           | •          | •            |
| B2 Immersion             | Energy/Energetic state (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, 2017, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001) |             |           | •         |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Enjoyment (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003)   |             |           | •         |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Enthusiasm (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, 2017, 2018; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Harter et al., 2003, 2002)  |             |           | •         |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Experiential quality of doing work (Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            | •            |
| B2 Immersion             | Focused effort (Macey & Schneider, 2008)  |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Happiness (Schaufeli et al., 2002)  |             |           | •         |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Job involvement (Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; May et al., 2004; Maslach et al., 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Passion (Zigarmi et al., 2009; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Wellins & Concelman, 2005)  |             |           | •         |            |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Positive affect (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Sonnentag, 2003; Kahn, 1990)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| B2 Immersion             | Productivity (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Harter et al., 2002)  |             |           |           | •          | •            |
| B2 Immersion             | Psychologically present, being present, connected, integrated (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990)  |             |           |           | •          |              |
| B2 Immersion             | Vigor (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shirom, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002)   |             |           | •         |            | •            |
| B3 Success               | Contribution, opportunity to make important (Shuck, 2011; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Hackman & Oldham, 1980)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| B3 Success               | Impact (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995)   |             | •         |           |            |              |
| B3 Success               | Job performance (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)  |             |           |           | •          | •            |
| B3 Success               | Performance, individual (Christian, et al., 2011; Alfes et al., 2010; Bakker & Xanopoulou, 2009)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| C1 Inclusion             | Belonging (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982)   |             |           |           | •          |              |
| C1 Inclusion             | High quality relationships (Saks, 2006)   |             |           |           |            | •            |
| C1 Inclusion             | Show warmth to others (ability to; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shirom, 2003)   |             |           |           |            | •            |
| C1 Inclusion             | Social relatedness & connectedness (Soane et al., 2012; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Meyer & Gagné, 2008; Kahn, 1990)   |             | •         |           |            | •            |
| C2 Caring                | Caring, concern, and support demonstrated (Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1992)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| C2 Caring                | Community & social support (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| C2 Caring                | Manager support (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Harter et al., 2002)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived organizational support (Saks, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2001)  | •           |           |           |            |              |



**Table 4** (continued)

| Motivational matrix cell | Employee engagement concepts  | Antecedents | Cognitive | Emotional | Behavioral | Consequences |
|--------------------------|---|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| C2 Caring                | Perceived supervisor support (Saks, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2001)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| C2 Caring                | Social support (Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Maslach et al., 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| C2 Caring                | Supportive supervisors & management (Shuck, 2011; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Hackman & Oldham, 1980)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| C3 Recognition           | Pride (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Mowday et al., 1982)  |             |           |           |            | •            |
| C3 Recognition           | Rewards & recognition (appropriate; Saks 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D1 Justice               | Distributive justice (Saks, 2006, Colquitt, 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D1 Justice               | Perceived fairness (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice (Saks, 2006, Colquitt, 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Dedication (Shuck, 2011; Thomas, 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2002)  |             | •         | •         |            |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Emotional & intellectual commitment to the organization (Saks, 2006; Baumruk, 2004; Richman, 2006; Shaw, 2005; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986)  |             | •         | •         |            |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Loyalty (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)   |             |           |           | •          |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Mutual Commitments (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)  |             |           |           | •          |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Organizational citizenship behavior directed to the individual (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Lee & Allen, 2002)   |             |           |           | •          |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Organizational citizenship behavior directed to the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Lee & Allen, 2002)   |             |           |           | •          |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Organizational commitment behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Robinson et al., 2004; Rhoades et al., 2001)   |             |           |           | •          |              |
| D2 Ethics                | Values (Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D3 Purpose               | Adaptive behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008)   |             |           |           | •          |              |
| D3 Purpose               | Meaningfulness in work and at work (psychological; Kahn, 1990; Saks & Gruman, 2014; James et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Brown & Leigh, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995) | •           | •         |           |            |              |
| D3 Purpose               | Organizational purpose (Macey & Schneider, 2008)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D3 Purpose               | Personal meaning (sense of purpose; Macey & Schneider, 2008)  | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D3 Purpose               | Purpose (Macey & Schneider, 2008)   | •           |           |           |            |              |
| D3 Purpose               | Transformational leadership (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Bakker et al., 2011; Christian et al., 2011; Macey & Schneider, 2008)   | •           | •         | •         |            | •            |

**Table 5** Employee engagement assessment items that conform to the consensus view

| Motivational matrix cell | Factor or Component              | Employee engagement item   | Source   |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| A1 Safety                | Rewards and Recognition          | Job security.  | Saks (2006)  |
| A2 Authenticity          | Perceived organizational support | My organization strongly considers my goals and values.  | Saks (2006)  |
| A2 Authenticity          | Perceived organizational support | My organization cares about my opinions.   | Saks (2006)  |
| A2 Authenticity          | Perceived supervisor support     | My supervisor cares about my opinions.   | Saks (2006)  |
| A2 Authenticity          | Perceived supervisor support     | My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values.  | Saks (2006)  |
| A3 Potential             | Rewards and Recognition          | More freedom and opportunities.  | Saks (2006)  |
| A3 Potential             | Rewards and Recognition          | Training and development opportunities.  | Saks (2006)  |
| A3 Potential             | Rewards and Recognition          | More challenging work assignments.   | Saks (2006)  |
| A3 Potential             | Dedication                       | To me, my job is challenging   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B1 Autonomy              | Job characteristics              | How much autonomy is there in your job? That is, to what extent does your job permit you to decide on your own how to go about doing the work? | Saks (2006)  |
| B1 Autonomy              | Vigor                            | When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B1 Autonomy              | Vigor                            | At my job, I am very resilient, mentally   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Vigor                            | At my work, I feel bursting with energy  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Vigor                            | At my job, I feel strong and vigorous  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Cognitive engagement             | Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else  | May et al. (2004) Engagement Scale                   |
| B2 Immersion             | Cognitive engagement             | I am rarely distracted when performing my job  | May et al. (2004) Engagement Scale                   |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | I really put my heart into my job  | May et al. (2004) Engagement Scale                   |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | I often feel emotionally detached from my job (r)  | May et al. (2004) Engagement Scale                   |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | I exert a lot of energy performing my job  | May et al. (2004) Engagement Scale                   |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | Work with intensity  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | Exert my full effort   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | Devote a lot of energy   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | Try my hardest to perform well   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | Strive as hard as I can  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Physical engagement              | Exert a lot of energy  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | Enthusiastic   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | Feel energetic   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | Interested   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | Feel positive  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement             | Excited  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Cognitive engagement             | Mind is focused  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |

**Table 5** (continued)

| Motivational matrix cell | Factor or Component     | Employee engagement item   | Source   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement    | Pay a lot of attention   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Emotional engagement    | Focus a great deal of attention  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             |                         | Absorbed   | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             |                         | Concentrate  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             | Job engagement          | Devote a lot of attention  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| B2 Immersion             |                         | I really “throw” myself into my job.   | Saks (2006)  |
| B2 Immersion             | Job engagement          | Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time.   | Saks (2006)  |
| B2 Immersion             | Job engagement          | This job is all consuming; I am totally into it.   | Saks (2006)  |
| B2 Immersion             | Job engagement          | My mind often wanders and I think of other things when doing my job (R).                               | Saks (2006)  |
| B2 Immersion             | Job engagement          | I am highly engaged in this job.   | Saks (2006)  |
| B2 Immersion             | Intellectual engagement | I focus hard on my work  | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| B2 Immersion             | Intellectual engagement | I concentrate on my work   | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| B2 Immersion             | Intellectual engagement | I pay a lot of attention to my work  | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| B2 Immersion             | Affective engagement    | I feel positive about my work  | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| B2 Immersion             | Affective engagement    | I feel energetic in my work  | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| B2 Immersion             | Affective engagement    | I am enthusiastic in my work   | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption              | Time flies when I’m working  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Dedication              | I am enthusiastic about my job   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption              | When I am working, I forget everything else around me  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption              | I feel happy when I am working intensely   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption              | I am immersed in my work   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption              | I get carried away when I’m working  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B2 Immersion             | Absorption              | It is difficult to detach myself from my job   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B3 Success               | Vigor                   | I can continue working for very long periods at a time   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B3 Success               | Vigor                   | At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| B3 Success               | Physical engagement     | I stay until the job is done   | May et al. (2004) Engagement Scale                   |
| B3 Success               | Rewards and Recognition | A pay raise.   | Saks (2006)  |
| B3 Success               | Rewards and Recognition | A promotion.   | Saks (2006)  |
| B3 Success               | Rewards and Recognition | A reward or token of appreciation (e.g. lunch).  | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Organization engagement | Being a member of this organization is very captivating.   | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Organization engagement | One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in this organization. | Saks (2006)  |

Table 5 (continued)

| Motivational matrix cell | Factor or Component              | Employee engagement item  | Source   |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| C1 Inclusion             | Organization engagement          | I am really not into the “goings-on” in this organization (R).                            | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Organization engagement          | Being a member of this organization make me come “alive.”                                 | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Organization engagement          | Being a member of this organization is exhilarating for me.                               | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Organization engagement          | I am highly engaged in this organization.   | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Organizational commitment        | I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.                                    | Saks (2006)  |
| C1 Inclusion             | Social engagement                | I share the same work values as my colleagues   | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| C1 Inclusion             | Social engagement                | I share the same work goals as my colleagues  | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| C1 Inclusion             | Social engagement                | I share the same work attitudes as my colleagues  | Soane et al. (2012) ISA Engagement Scale             |
| C2 Caring                | Job characteristics              | To what extent do managers or co-workers let you know how well you are doing on your job? | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Rewards and Recognition          | Praise from your supervisor.  | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived organizational support | My organization really cares about my well-being.   | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived organizational support | My organization shows little concern for me (R).  | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived organizational support | My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.                          | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived organizational support | Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.                             | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived organizational support | My organization would forgive a honest mistake on my part.                                | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived supervisor support     | My work supervisor really cares about my well-being.                                      | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Perceived supervisor support     | My supervisor shows very little concern for me (R).                                       | Saks (2006)  |
| C2 Caring                | Emotional engagement             | Proud of  | Rich, LePine, & Crawford (2010) Job engagement scale |
| C3 Recognition           | Rewards and Recognition          | Respect from the people you work with.  | Saks (2006)  |
| C3 Recognition           | Rewards and Recognition          | Some form of public recognition (e.g. employee of the month).                             | Saks (2006)  |
| C3 Recognition           | Organizational commitment        | I am proud to tell others I work at my organization.                                      | Saks (2006)  |
| C3 Recognition           | Dedication                       | I am proud on the work that I do  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES       |
| D1 Justice               | Distributive justice             | Do the outcomes you receive reflect the effort you have put into your work?               | Saks (2006)  |
| D1 Justice               | Distributive justice             | Are the outcomes you receive appropriate for the work you have completed?                 | Saks (2006)  |
| D1 Justice               | Distributive justice             | Do your outcomes reflect what you have contributed to the organization?                   | Saks (2006)  |
| D1 Justice               | Distributive justice             | Are your outcomes justified given your performance?                                       | Saks (2006)  |
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice               | Have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures?            | Saks (2006)  |

**Table 5** (continued)

| Motivational matrix cell | Factor or Component              | Employee engagement item  | Source   |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice               | Have you had influence over the outcomes arrived at by those procedures?  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice               | Have those procedures been applied consistently?  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice               | Have those procedures been free of bias?  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice               | Have those procedures been based on accurate information?   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D1 Justice               | Procedural justice               | Have you been able to appeal the outcomes arrived at by those procedures?   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D1 Justice               | Perceived organizational support | If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me (R).   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | Procedural justice               | Have those procedures upheld ethical and moral standards?   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | Organizational commitment        | I really feel that problems faced by my organization are also my problems.  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | Organizational commitment        | I feel personally attached to my work organization.   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBI                             | Willingly give your time to help others who have work-related problems.   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBI                             | Adjust your work schedule to accommodate other employees' requests for time off.  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBI                             | Give up time to help others who have work or non-work problems.   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBI                             | Assist others with their duties.  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBO                             | Attend functions that are not required but that help the organizational image.  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBO                             | Offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organization.   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBO                             | Take action to protect the organization from potential problems.  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D2 Ethics                | OCBO                             | Defend the organization when other employees criticize it   | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D3 Purpose               | Job characteristics              | In general, how significant or important in your job? That is, are the results of your work likely to significantly affect the lives or well-being of other people? | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D3 Purpose               | Organizational commitment        | Working at my organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me.  | Saks (2006)                                    |
| D3 Purpose               | Dedication                       | I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose   | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES |
| D3 Purpose               | Dedication                       | My job inspires me  | Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). UWES |

**Data Availability** All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article (and its supplementary information files). Original source materials are available from the author by request.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** There are no conflicts of interests which need to be disclosed.

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