

# Organisational Culture and Employee Engagement in Education Sector: A Conceptual Framework

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## **Abstract**

*Organizational culture is deeply rooted within the organizational system of the universities, as it is a process, which evolves over a long period of time. An organization's culture determines and influences the way any university conducts its educational activities. Because the culture is deep-rooted, it is difficult to change, as there is often resistance against giving up something, which is valued and has worked well in the past. This study attempts to improve the educational institutions; understanding on how to improve organizational culture dimensions that may have a critical impact on engagement.*

*Employee engagement is the most important topic for any higher education institution in the era of globalization. Institutional productivity is directly proportional to employee engagement. The level of commitment of an employee is reflected in his engagement in the field of higher Education in India. The success of a higher education institute depends upon the level of commitment of its employees and their engagement. In this article, literature supported organizational culture and its role in improving institutional performance to address the organizational success in higher education in India. The strength of academic culture depends upon avoiding any strains like destructive conflicts between faculties, or losing one's professional morale.*

**Keywords:** *Organisational culture, engagement, employee engagement, education and faculty.*

## **Introduction**

The paper analyzes previous researches to define organizational culture especially in higher educational institutions. It is also a case study of institutes of higher education and reflects on existing culture, thus, it concludes with new areas of research which can be explored by future researchers in the field of higher education.

Culture plays an important role in higher education, as well as, performance at the university or college level. Sometimes it becomes difficult to understand what is more important for an educational institution. Does its success depend upon its values or its rules and regulations or its distinguished faculties? These questions are almost impossible to answer because there is no specific answer to the pertaining question. Two People having the same style of leadership

can produce different results. Similarly, educational institutions with the same mission as well as syllabi can give different performance results because of their different perceptions.

Employee engagement determines organizational culture in higher education. The Productivity of a higher education intuition depends upon the level of employee engagement and his level of commitment. The success of a university or college depends upon the level of engagement of its faculty. This determines the strength of academic culture. It is important to provide a rationale as to why organizational culture is an indispensable concept for executing powerful management which directly tells upon the performance in higher education.

Universities and colleges are also affected by social, political and economic conditions as well as other internal forces. The internal factors are derived from its goals and values held together by its faculty who are involved in organizational working. The culture of an organization is decided by what decision is taken, how it is taken and who is involved in taking it. Organization is also embedded in traditions as opined by Anthropologist (Geertz, 1973)

Denotes a historically transmitted of meaning embedded in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed symbolic forms by means of which (People) Communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973)

According to him organizational culture comes into form through interpolation of actions as well as symbolic and historical forms. Hence, the culture of an organization has its roots in assumptions and acts of faculty participating in the higher education institutions. These assumptions can be interpreted through the language, norms, values and ideology of the faculty which determines organizational behavior. Thus, the interpretation and an analysis of higher education institute can be done as if it is inter connected web and cannot be done in isolation. Hence, organizational culture and engagement studies webs of significance in an education.

However, people at administrative position can only make assumptions about cultural conditions only that gain predominance in routine decision making; there are certain symbols, codes and norms which become instrumental in determining cultural conditions. When one breaks these symbols, codes and norms, one is reminded of the power these parameters exercise. People holding administrative positions are able to understand their organizational culture in the field of higher education.

## Theoretical Background and Literature Review

### Organizational Culture

Organizational culture in higher education depends on employee engagement, Ambler (2007) discusses the importance of 10 C's for employee engagement which are also enlisted in Ivey business Journal: connect, career, clarity, convey, congratulate, contribute, control, collaborate, credibility and confidence.

Robinson (2006) opines that the level of employee engagement leads to good work environment in which positive emotions flourish which leads to improve performance of the organization.

Kahn (1990) makes a quality related survey of the psychology and level of engagement of summer camp counselors by interviewing them. The employees who were disengaged showed bad performance. Goffman (1961) opined that people had different levels of attachment and detachment to their roles.

Hewitt (2001) studies employee engagement as energy, fire in the belly and passion which employees have which gives them an impetus to carry on and strive towards good work.

Any lack of understanding about the importance of culture in an organization stops us from being able to address the challenges of higher education. As these challenges increase, there is a need for us to understand organizational culture with many higher educational institutions facing fragmentation, resource allocation becomes increasingly difficult. The influence of culture varies at different levels, from one department to another and from one institution to another. Understanding the central goal of organizational culture leads to lessening the occurrence and consequence of conflicting cultures. Thus, cultural dynamics in higher education help us create an understanding and lower the instances of adverse relationships. Also it helps us to see actions and their reactions, their common goals and how they can be administered. Thus, culture is a major force in decision-making. Organizational culture aids in:

- Recognizing operational conflicts in an organization.
- Recognize daily decisions and their influence on organizational culture.
- Understand the importance of diversity in an organization leads to different perceptions about performance level in higher educational colleges and universities.

Not being able to understand the importance of organizational culture in higher education stops us from addressing the challenges that universities and colleges face. As these challenges grow, there is a need to comprehend the intensity of organizational culture. Many Indian institutions face complex challenges due to these reasons.

Just as the power of decision-making becomes secretive, budgets rise and resources become scanty, the leaders of higher education can gain only by gaining insight in the cultural identity of the institution the leaders are required to make difficult decisions which lead to the institution having a sense of identity and purpose. In order to apply these decisions, leaders should have a complete understanding of the organization's culture.

This article outlines core steps to be taken to ensure culture and systems are harmoniously brought together to create a new high performing business (Atkinson, 2006). Al-Sokhni (2005) investigates the availability of organisational culture five core components (vision, beliefs, values, norms, and expectations). For the past decades, most academics and practitioners studying organisations suggest the concept of the culture is the climate and

practices that organisations develop around their handling of people, or to the promoted values & statement of beliefs of an organisation (Schien, 2004).

This article described and discusses the related theory on organizational culture (OC). According to Watson (2006) concept of culture derived from a metaphor of the organisation as ‘something cultivated’. Robbins (1986) defines organisational culture as a relatively uniform perception, it has common characteristics, it is descriptive, it can distinguish one organization from another and it integrates individuals, groups and organisation systems variables. Aftab et al. (2012) aimed to study the impact of organisational culture on role-based performance. According to Sinha & Arora (2012), the specific objectives of study were to identify a suitable culture for business excellence and to assess and measure this culture. Al-Enezi (2011) study includes six dimensions of organisational culture i.e. performance appraisal, conflict resolution, leadership & teamwork, training, quality, and finally mission, vision and values. (Ussahawanitchakit, 2008) examined and investigated the relationship between five dimensions of service culture (high-quality service, communicate openly and honestly, service responsiveness, service failure prevention, and service recovery) and organisational excellence.

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There are many terms used by different researchers to denote organisational culture. Similarly, there are many definitions of organisational culture. Organisational culture has been characterized by many authors as something to do with people and the unique quality and style of the organisation (Kilman et al; 1985), Sometimes, organisation culture is also known as “corporate culture”. “Corporate Culture” is used to denote the more “commercialized” meaning of organisational culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

### **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has shown to have a statistical relationship with productivity, profitability, employee retention, safety, and customer satisfaction (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002). Similar relationships have not been shown for most traditional organisational constructs such as job satisfaction (Fisher & Locke, 1992). Employee engagement has become an important topic, not only for academics and for researchers but also for practitioners in organisations (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). Employee engagement has become an important topic, not only for academics and for researchers but also for practitioners in organisations (May et al., 2004).

Firstly, Kahn (1990) to conceptualize personal engagement in work roles and to identify the psychological conditions and antecedents thereof conducted a qualitative study. Based on the model of Kahn (1990), May et al. (2004) and Olivier & Rothmann (2007) tested structural

models of employee engagement. Secondly, interest in engagement arose with the shift in focus in industrial psychology from weaknesses, malfunctioning and damage towards happiness, human strengths and optimal functioning i.e positive organisational behavior (Rothmann, 2003; Strumpfer, 2003). Peterson et al. (2005) regarded the study and promotion of happiness at work as an important goal and suggested three routes to happiness, namely pleasure, engagement and meaning. Thirdly, in the burnout literature (Maslach & Leiter, 1997), interest arose in engagement (energy, involvement and efficacy) as the direct opposite of burnout (exhaustion, cynicism and low professional efficacy). Lastly, research by Schaufeli et al. (2002) stimulated studies regarding employee engagement as the antipode of burnout, but a construct in its own right.

Before attempting to define the construct of work engagement, it is important to understand what a construct really is. Schmitt & Klimoski (1991) define a construct as a concept that has been deliberately created or adopted for a scientific purpose. A construct cannot be observed; it must be inferred. For example, by observing a set of behaviors one might infer that a person possesses a particular construct, such as maturity. Merely attaching a name to a collection of survey items does not make it a construct. The measure must be validated by comparing and contrasting the construct to similar and different constructs to demonstrate that it is related to those constructs in theoretically predictable ways.

On similar lines as Kahn (1990), Robinson et al. (2004) consider work engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. They opine that an engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. Engagement is a two-way relationship between employer and employee. It overlaps with commitment and organisational citizenship behavior, but it is two-way relationship and is “one step up” from commitment. Interestingly, the most contemporary research on work engagement has been stimulated by research on burnout. Maslach and Leiter (1997) termed engagement as the positive antipode of burnout. They rephrased burnout as an erosion of engagement with the job. In the view of these authors, work engagement is characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy, which are considered the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions, namely exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy respectively.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) partly agree with Maslach and Leiter’s (1997) description, but take a different perspective and define work engagement in its own right. It is not plausible to expect that burnout and engagement are perfectly negatively correlated. That is, when an employee is not burned-out, this doesn’t necessarily mean that one is engaged the work. Reversibly, when an employee is low on engagement, this does not mean that one is burned-out.

Hence, Schaufeli et al. (2002) consider that burnout and work engagement are two distinct concepts that should be assessed independently. This means that, at least theoretically, an employee who is not burned-out may score high or low on engagement, whereas an engaged employee may score high or low on burnout. Furthermore, burnout and engagement may be considered on two independent dimensions of activation and identification. Activation ranges from exhaustion to vigour, while identification range from cynicism to dedication. Burnout is characterised by a combination of exhaustion (low activation) and cynicism (low

identification), whereas engagement is characterised by vigour (high activation) and dedication (high identification).

In later years engagement has been defined as how each individual employee connects with the organisation and with customers (Lucey & Hines, 2005) ; the extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do (DDI, 2005). Erickson (2005) articulated a view that engagement is beyond simple satisfaction with the employment arrangement or basic loyalty to the employer. Engagement, in contrast, is about passion and commitment—the willingness to invest oneself and expend one’s discretionary effort to help the employer succeed.

Macey & Schneider (2008) distinguished three broad conceptualizations of employee engagement, namely state, trait, and behavioral engagement. State engagement can be defined from two perspectives, namely engagement as an extension of the self to a role (Kahn, 1990), and employees’ work activities as a reference for engagement (Bakker et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

A “heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation that influences him or her to exert greater Mike Johnson (2004) in his book entitled, “The new rules of engagement”, that ‘the ability to engage employees, to make them with our business, is going to be one of the greatest organisational battles of the coming ten years. The concepts related to these are visible in the literature after nearly two decades. According to Saks (2006); Bakker & Schaufeli (2008) EE has emerged as an organisational concept in the recent years. Macey & Schneider (2008) revealed that as the concept of EE has grown in popularity, it has undergone significant developments in definitions, measurement and conceptualization; all while in the academic community has lagged behind. EE can be defining as the level of commitment and involvement of an employee has towards its organisation and its values.

Kahn (1990) defines it as the “harnessing of the organisational members’ selves to their work roles”. McCashland (1999) has defined EE as ‘commitment or engagement- an emotional outcome to the employee resulting from the critical components of the workplace. Miles, 2001 state that intensively involving all employees in high engagement cascades that understanding, dialogue, feedback and accountability, empower people to creatively align their subunits, teams and individual jobs with the major transformation of the whole enterprise. The individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm work (Harter et al., 2002). Later, Harter et al. (2003) together redefined it as cognitive & emotional antecedents in the workplace. Engagement involves both ‘emotional and rational factors relating to work and the overall work experiences (Towers Perrin, 2003). People’s personal satisfaction and the sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from their work and from being, part of their organisation is emotional factors. Mahendru & Sharma (2006) explained that “degree of commitment towards the hub which an employee performs and till how long the employee remains in the organisation as a result of their commitment”. Stockley (2006) defined engagement as “the extent of employees that an employee believes in the mission, purpose and values of an organization and demonstrates that commitment through their action as an employee and their attitudes towards their employer and the customers. Engagement is define as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral state directed toward desired organisational outcome (Shuck & wollard, 2010).

Maslach & Leiters (1997) proposed conceptualization of engagement (psychological components) as a construct includes energy, involvement, and efficacy. Again, in 1998, Maslach & Leiters defined as an “energetic experience of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance a staff member’s sense of professional efficacy”. In addition to this, they emphasized that these conditions are at the other end of continuum of the conditions that include burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. They also suggested burnout or disengagement leads to breakdown of the social environment at work. Similarly, robotic behaviors, people feel burned out, completion require little effort is result in disengagement (Kahn, 1990). In contrast to Maslach & Leiters (1997) classified engagement as an opposite of burnout (energy, involvement, and efficacy) rather than exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. On the other hand, (Schaufeli et al., 2002) state that researchers began to propose that engagement and burnout were distinct constructs. Specifically, they defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work- related state of mind that characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. A construct that combines the intensity and absorption described by Schaufeli and colleagues (2002) and the meaning and significance found in activities by engaged people (Kahn, 1990). Kahn, 1990 & Rothbard (2001) define engagement as a two- dimensional motivational construct firstly, attention which means the cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role) and, secondly, absorption which means the intensity of one’s focus on role.

Macey & Schneider (2008) includes both psychological and behavioral components i.e. state, trait and behavioral. Trait engagements are actually dispositional antecedents of engagement; and their reference to behavioral engagement is actually the behavioral consequences of engagement. Above-mentioned definitions include personal aspects and a feeling is higher education’s classification of engagement. Specifically focused on student engagement is viewed as behaviors, allocation of time, effort devoted to, or involvement in educationally purposeful activities (Astin, 1984; Hu & Kuh, 2002). Likewise, engagement level of faculty members in higher education literature is also varying. Engagement with reference to faculty members commonly signifies service activities that extend beyond the institution (Antonio et al., 2000; Ward, 2003). Boyer’s model (1990) suggest that faculty member uses knowledge gained though research to assist others in the community and has been synonymously with faculty engagement (O’ Meara et al., 2009).

Schreiner & Louis (2006) proposed student engagement with respect to learning as multidimensional construct defined as a “positive energy invested in one’s own learning, evidenced by meaningful processing, attention to what is happening in the moment, and involvement in specific learning activities”. The conceptualization of an engagement as a construct that includes behavioral, cognitive and affective closely resembles the current definition of faculty engagement.

### Implications and Conclusion

In order to contribute towards success in higher education, institutional leaders need to concentrate on decision-making with regard to allocation of costs and resources in the right direction but many institutional leaders realize the importance of organizational culture and

its impact on institutional success as the main reason for determining organizational success. This study will help the faculties in realizing their impact in the college and interaction must be characterized by a certain quality. Institutes or colleges try to provide some kind of training, workshop and seminar for the faculty. Through this, they will get some new thoughts of teaching skills. Effective engagement help the institutes or colleges to perform better, this can be in the form of academic results, sports achievement, retention of faculty or any other form of accomplishment.

Every organisation and its culture varies as per the several indicators includes geographic area, pedagogy etc. Similarly, even employee engagement can also vary through working conditions, salary, faculty development programs, reward etc. Investigating the concepts alone or in different relationships with other variables will result in greater understanding of organisational culture, and employee engagement. The conceptual analysis showed that organisational culture has a significant impact on engagement.

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