

# Innovations

## The link between knowledge creation and employee engagement: A literature review

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### Abstract

*This article explores the link between knowledge creation and employee engagement. The objective of this study is to review the body of research on knowledge creation and employee engagement and offers a conceptual framework that links the two concepts. The study also examines the framework's implications for practitioners, managers, and academic leaders who want to create a culture of knowledge creation and worker engagement in their organization. According to the study, organisations and their workforce alike stand a chance to gain from knowledge creation and employee engagement as they are advantageous. The study concluded that knowledge creation is a key driver of employees' engagement, as it enables them to develop their competencies, share their insights, collaborate with others, and contribute to organisational goals.*

**Keywords:** *knowledge creation, employee engagement, innovation, exploration and exploitation*

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### Introduction

Employee engagement and knowledge creation are two critical topics in the field of organisational behavior and management. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) define knowledge creation as the process of developing new or enhanced knowledge through individual or communal learning, innovation, and creativity. Employee engagement is defined as employees' level of dedication, interest, and passion for their work and company (Kahn, 1990). Both principles have important consequences for organisational performance, competitiveness, and long-term viability. The link between knowledge creation and employee engagement, on the other hand, is little known. This study will investigate this relationship by examining available material. The study also explores the framework's consequences for theory and practice, as well as possible future research prospect. The primary goal of this study is to investigate the connection between knowledge creation and employee engagement in the context of organisational learning. The research specifically intends to:

- Identify the types and sources of knowledge that workers create in their work activities.
- Investigate the elements influencing workers' motivation and desire to participate in knowledge creation activities.

- Examine how knowledge creation affects employee engagement,
- Create a conceptual framework and a measuring instrument for assessing organizational knowledge creation and employee engagement.
- Provide managers and practitioners with practical implications and ideas for fostering a culture of knowledge creation and employee engagement.

## Literature review

The process of developing new or enhanced knowledge through exploration and exploitation is referred to as knowledge creation (Bouncken, Aslam, Gantert, & Kallmuenzer, 2023). Exploration is the quest for new ideas and possibilities, whereas exploitation is the refinement and use of current knowledge. Employee engagement is defined as the degree to which a person feels committed to, identified with, happy with, and encouraged by their work (Boccoli, Gastaldi, & Corso, 2023). Employees that are engaged tend to perform better, have less burnout, and remain with their businesses for a longer period of time (Chanana, 2021).

Knowledge is a vital asset for every firm since it improves decision-making, innovation, and performance. Not all knowledge, however, is equally accessible or beneficial. Knowledge may be classified depending on its codification, or the extent to which it can be communicated and disseminated. There are three categories of knowledge, according to this distinction: explicit, implicit, and tacit (Davies, 2015).

- Explicit knowledge is the knowledge that is easily documented, conveyed, and learned by others. It is frequently seen in databases, reports, manuals, books, and other types of spoken or written communication. Customer profiles, product specifications, organisational policies, and best practices are examples of explicit knowledge in the workplace.
- Implicit knowledge is the knowledge that has not yet been documented but can be codified if necessary. It is frequently included into routines, processes, approaches and methods. Know-how, skills, competence, and experience are examples of implicit knowledge in the workplace.
- Tacit knowledge is difficult to express and codify since it is dependent on values, judgment, intuition and personal insights. It is frequently gained via observation and engagement with others. Creativity, leadership, problem-solving, and culture are all examples of tacit knowledge in the workplace.

The sources of knowledge are the methods through which employees learn and develop knowledge in the course of their work. Nonanka (1994) defines four major sources of knowledge as socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization.

- Socialisation is a source of knowledge that includes individuals exchanging tacit knowledge through observation, practice, and imitation. Informal communication, coaching, mentorship, and teamwork are frequently used to facilitate it.
- Externalisation is the process of transforming tacit information into explicit knowledge by articulation, documentation, and visualization. Formal communication, training, education, and feedback are frequently used to facilitate it.
- Composition is a source of knowledge that involves the clear integration, synthesis, and analysis of knowledge from multiple sources to produce new clear knowledge. This is often aided by information technology such as repositories, databases and systems.
- Internalization is the transformation of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge by assimilating, analyzing, and using knowledge sources. This is facilitated by frequent use of learning by doing, tests, simulations and assessments.

Knowledge management (KM) is the process of finding, organizing, storing and distributing knowledge in an organisation (Ammirato, Linzalone and Felicetti, 2021). Knowledge management seeks to use the many forms and sources of knowledge that employees generate in their work activities to achieve organizational goals. According to Ammirato et al. (2021), knowledge management requires several activities such as:

- Knowledge Identification: determine the scope and limitations of important organizational knowledge.
- Knowledge Acquisition: obtaining knowledge from internal or external sources.
- Knowledge creation: generating new knowledge from existing or new sources
- Knowledge storage: structuring and keeping knowledge in accessible ways.
- Knowledge refinement: validating, enhancing, and updating knowledge
- Knowledge transfer: the distribution and exchange of knowledge among individuals or groups.
- Knowledge utilisation: putting knowledge to use for decision-making or action.

Knowledge management requires various tools and techniques to support its activities such as:

- Knowledge base: a searchable and retrievable centralized repository of explicit knowledge.
- Knowledge map: a visual depiction of the organization's knowledge placement and flow.
- Knowledge audit: a comprehensive examination of the organization's existing status and knowledge deficiencies.
- Knowledge portal: a web-based platform that enables access to a variety of knowledge sources.
- information network: a social organization that links persons with or who require comparable information.
- Knowledge community: a collection of people who have a shared interest or knowledge

In today's dynamic and complex world, creating knowledge is critical for organizational learning, innovation, and competitiveness (Ordieres-Meré, Remon, & Rubio., 2020). The process of knowledge creation is not automated or simple. It demands employees investing cognitive resources, effort and time in order to develop and share information that may or may not have immediate or concrete advantages for themselves or their work units. As a result, employees must be encouraged to participate in knowledge creation activities and overcome possible hurdles or problems. Motivation is the psychological energy that propels people to begin and maintain a certain action or behaviour. Individual, interpersonal, and organizational variables can all have an impact on motivation.

Employee motivation to engage in knowledge creation activities is influenced by human qualities such as values, beliefs, attitudes, interests, objectives, skills, and talents (Bouncken, et al, 2023). Employees who value learning and progress, for example, are more likely to seek out new knowledge and share it with others than those who are content with their present level of knowledge and abilities. Employees who think that knowledge creation is relevant and valuable to them and their company are more inclined to participate in knowledge creation activities than those who deny its importance (Prompreing & Hu, 2021). Employees who see knowledge creation positively are more likely to appreciate and embrace it than those who see it as a burden or a danger. Employees who have defined and demanding knowledge creation goals are more likely to pursue them with tenacity and zeal than those who lack clear or relevant objectives. Employees who believe in their potential to generate and share knowledge are more likely to overcome obstacles and challenges than those who believe they are inept or insecure (Barua, 2021).

At the interpersonal level, employees' willingness to engage in learning activities is influenced by their social interactions and connections with others, such as colleagues, managers, mentors or external partners. For example, employees who have high levels of trust and support from others are more willing to offer their

knowledge openly and freely than those who fear abuse or criticism (Barua, 2021). Employees who have a strong sense of reciprocity and mutual gain from shared knowledge are more inclined to continue sharing their expertise than those who believe they give more than they receive. Employees who have a strong sense of belonging and connection with their work group or organization are more likely than those who feel alone or alienated to contribute to the established knowledge pool (Ritsri & Meeprom, 2020). Employees who receive positive feedback and acknowledgment for their contributions to knowledge creation are more likely to be pleased and motivated than those who are disregarded or underestimated.

At the organizational level, employees' desire to engage in knowledge creation activities is influenced by the organizational culture, structure, processes, and policies which define the work environment and affect employee behaviour and outcomes (Khoa & Hoa, 2021). Employees who work in an organizational culture that values and fosters learning, creativity, cooperation, and openness, for example, are more likely to engage in knowledge creation activities than those who work in a culture that values stability, conformity, competitiveness, and secrecy (Prompreing & Hu, 2021). Employees who work in an organizational structure that facilitates cooperation, coordination and communication across different units, levels, and functions are more likely to access and integrate diverse sources of knowledge than those who work in a structure that creates silos, barriers, and conflicts between different groups. Employees who work in organizations with systems and policies that offer adequate rewards, resources and opportunities for knowledge creation are more likely to invest in and participate in knowledge creation activities than employees who work in organizations with systems and policies that limit or discourage knowledge creation (Sumarto & Rumaningsih, 2021).

### **The antecedents of employee engagement**

The antecedents of employee engagement can be classified into five categories: psychological states, job design, leadership, organizational and team factors, and organizational interventions (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

- Psychological states include factors such as psychological safety, psychological empowerment, perceived organisational support and self-efficacy (Falola, Oludayo, Igbinoba, Salau & Borishade, 2018; Sumarto & Rumaningsih, 2021).
- Job design relates to work-related features such as task significance, task identity, skill variation, feedback and autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Chanana, 2021).
- Leadership comprises managers' and supervisors' behaviors and styles that influence employees' performance, commitment, trust and motivation (Atapattu & Huybers, 2022; Hermawan, Thamrin., & Susilo, 2020).
- organizational and team factors include an organizational climate, culture, fairness, communication, incentives, recognition, and social support (Bapat & Upadhyay, 2021; Mohanty, 2021).
- Organizational interventions are actions performed by an organization to increase employee engagement, such as training, coaching, mentorship, career development, and wellness initiatives (Sumarto & Rumaningsih, 2021, Falola, Ogueyungbo & Ojebola, 2020).

Employee engagement outcomes are classified into two types: individual and organizational.

- Individual outcomes include factors such as well-being, creativity, innovation, job performance, organisational citizenship behavior, intention to quit, organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Hermawan, et al., 2020, Mohanty, 2021).

- Organizational outcomes include factors such as productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, quality, safety, and turnover (Bapat & Upadhyay, 2021; Chanana, 2021).

### **The impact of knowledge creation on employees' engagement**

Employee engagement, defined as the degree of interest, dedication, and excitement that workers have for their work and company (Kahn, 1990), might have a positive impact from knowledge creation. Employees who are engaged are more productive, creative, and loyal than those who are disengaged (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008).

A sense of empowerment may be fostered through knowledge creation to increase employee engagement. Empowerment is defined as a sense of autonomy, competence, and control over one's work environment (Onyango, Egessa & Ojera, 2022). Employees may exercise their skills, talents, and creativity while also having a voice and effect on corporate outcomes when they participate in knowledge creation activities. This can boost their self-efficacy, confidence, and job happiness (Ting et al., 2020). Recognition and prizes are another way that knowledge creation may increase employee engagement. Employee efforts and successes are acknowledged and appreciated through recognition and awards (Atapattu & Huybers, 2022). Employees might feel appreciated, respected, and inspired by their organization when they get recognition and rewards for their knowledge creation efforts. This can boost their sense of belonging, loyalty, and dedication to their jobs and organizations (Salau, Oludayo, Falola, Olokundun, Ibidunni & Atolagbe, 2018).

Several studies have discovered that knowledge creation methods including sharing, co-creation, and learning from others may boost employee engagement by enhancing their sense of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and recognition. (Atapattu & Huybers., 2022, Ting, Juan, Darun, Yao, Kweh., 2020, Berraies & Chouiref 2023). Employee engagement, on the other hand, may assist knowledge creation by encouraging workers to participate in exploration and exploitation activities and by cultivating an atmosphere of trust, transparency, and cooperation (Sumarto, Rumaningsih, 2021; conceptual model). As a result, we propose that companies implement a skill-based interactive employee engaging system (SIEES) to encourage employees to proactively acquire and share knowledge inside a company, so establishing a virtuous cycle of knowledge creation and employee engagement (Nair, Gaim, & Dimov 2020).

The framework is made up of four major components:

- SIEES antecedents, which include organizational characteristics (such as vision, strategy, leadership, culture, and structure) as well as human elements (such as motivation, aptitude, and personality) that impact SIEES adoption and use.
- SIEES features, which include design factors (such as gamification, personalisation, feedback, and recognition) as well as content components (such as skill evaluation, skill development, skill application, and skill sharing) that make SIEES successful and interesting.
- SIEES outcomes, which include both direct (such as knowledge creation and staff engagement) and indirect (such as performance improvement and innovation enhancement) impacts of employing SIEES; and
- SIEES moderators, which include contextual factors (task features, team dynamics, and environmental uncertainty) and individual factors (learning styles, preferences, and requirements) elements that influence the link between SIEES and its outcomes.

### **Balancing exploration and exploitation in knowledge creation**

Balancing exploration and exploitation in knowledge creation is a significant problem for firms seeking to innovate and compete in unstable environments. Exploration refers to the creation of new knowledge through non-targeted search activities, whereas exploitation refers to the application of existing knowledge through focused exploitation processes (Lannon & Walsh, 2020). However, Exploration and exploitation, include competing goals and trade-offs that produce paradoxical tensions for organizations (Gimenez Espin, Jimenez Jimenez, & Martinez Costa, 2022).

One of the key perspectives on balancing exploration and exploitation is organizational ambidexterity, which refers to the concurrent and balanced pursuit of both exploration and exploitation activities (Lee, Kang, & Kim, 2022). Different techniques can be used to produce organizational ambidexterity, such as structural distinction, temporal separation, contextual integration, or network cooperation (Lendowski, Grotenhermen, Jürgenschellert, & Schewe, 2022). However, Organizational ambidexterity provides major obstacles for coordination, alignment, and integration across multiple units or activities with potentially disparate procedures, cultures and goals (Roth & Corsi, 2023).

Another perspective on balancing exploration and exploitation is the concept of invention quality, which refers to the extent to which inventions mix new and old knowledge (Roth & Corsi, 2023). Inventions that strike a balance between exploration and exploitation are likely to be of greater quality than those that are either over-exploratory or over-exploitative since they may capitalize on both novelty and familiarity to achieve breakthroughs. Industry features, patent citation, patent scope, team experience, team size and team composition can all have an impact on invention quality (Gimenez Espin, et al., 2022).

Another perspective on balancing exploration and exploitation is Interorganizational ambidexterity, which is defined as the implementation of ambidexterity through a system of connected organizations that co-specialize in exploration or exploitation (Lannon & Walsh, 2020). Exploration can be outsourced to external think tanks that generate new knowledge in non-targeted search processes, whereas exploitation can be performed by internal units that focus on their core competencies in targeted exploitation processes. Some of the limits of intraorganizational ambidexterity, such as resource limitations, cognitive inertia, or cultural opposition, can be resolved via interorganizational ambidexterity (Puhan, 2008).

### **The challenges and opportunities for fostering knowledge creation and employees' engagement**

Both concepts have been shown to have positive effects on individual and organizational performance, as well as competitive advantage. However, fostering knowledge creation and employee engagement is not an easy task, as it involves a variety of challenges and opportunities at various levels of analysis.

At the individual level, employees must have sufficient personal resources, such as physical energy, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, to engage in knowledge creation and be engaged in their work. They must also balance exploration and exploitation activities, as too much or too little of either can result in negative outcomes such as boredom, anxiety, or stagnation (Roth & Corsi, 2023).

At the organizational level, Managers must create a conducive work environment that encourages knowledge creation and employee involvement (Onyango, et al. 2022). This involves giving workers proper employment rewards, management styles, work environments, and task features that can encourage and empower them to develop knowledge and be interested in their work. Managers must also build a learning and innovation culture that stimulates employee exploration and exploitation, as well as knowledge sharing and collaboration across different divisions and levels of the organization.



At the environmental level, organizations must deal with external challenges and opportunities that impact knowledge creation and employee engagement. Rapid changes in technology, consumer preferences, market circumstances, and competition, for example, need organizations to continually create new knowledge and adapt to new events (Ting et al., 2020). Partnerships with other companies, membership in networks and communities of practice, and access to varied sources of information and knowledge are all examples of external options that may enhance knowledge creation and employee engagement.

### **How to measure and manage employee engagement in a dynamic and diverse work environment**

Employee engagement refers to how devoted, pleased, and energized people are by their work (Turner & Turner, 2020). It is an important aspect in organizational performance since engaged individuals perform better, suffer less burnout, and remain with their employers longer. Measuring and controlling employee engagement, on the other hand, may be difficult, especially in a dynamic and varied work environment.

The first stages in measuring employee engagement is setting clear and defined goals for the company (Turner & Turner, 2020). Employees may integrate their work with the greater purpose and values of the firm by having a shared goal and vision. Setting SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) objectives may also assist employees in tracking their progress and successes, as well as identifying areas for growth. Setting objectives may also assist managers in evaluating staff performance and providing appropriate feedback.

Another step to gauge employee engagement is using employee survey software (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2020). Surveys are one of the most frequent and successful tools for gathering data on employee engagement levels since they may capture a variety of traits related to the employee experience, such as satisfaction, motivation, commitment, identity, and well-being. Employee engagement drivers and constraints, including corporate culture, work-life balance, growth opportunities, autonomy, feedback and recognition may also be revealed through surveys (Boccoli et al., 2023). Employee engagement may be measured using a variety of surveys, including yearly surveys, pulse surveys, and polls (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2020). Annual surveys are in-depth and comprehensive surveys that cover a wide variety of issues and serve as a baseline for employee engagement. Pulse surveys are brief, regular questionnaires that focus on specific topics or themes and give a real-time picture of employee engagement. Polls are brief polls that ask one or two questions and offer immediate feedback.

The third stage in measuring employee engagement is setting up meetings with employees at all levels (Verčič, 2021). Meetings are a vital approach to interacting with employees and hearing their problems, ideas, and worries. Meetings may also enhance cooperation and teamwork, as well as a sense of belonging and trust among employees and management. Depending on the aim and setting, meetings can be formal or casual, solo or group based (Turner & Turner, 2020). One-on-one sessions, for example, may be utilized to give staff personalized feedback, mentoring, and recognition. Team meetings are a great way for team members to discuss information, updates, and best practices. Town hall meetings may be used to inform all employees of corporate news, goals, and successes.

### **Related theories**

There are different theories that can explain how knowledge creation and employee engagement are related. Bourdieu proposed social capital theory in the 1980s, which refers to a relationship network that is created by a set of people that aids the achievement of common goals. Social capital theory suggests that knowledge

creation is dependent on the quality and quantity of social interactions among employees, such as trust, reciprocity, and shared standards (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). People with like goals forming a group will aid the sharing of information, pooling of resources, and collaborating at a community level. Employee engagement, according to this theory, may improve knowledge creation by creating a good and collaborative work atmosphere in which employees are ready to share their ideas, learn from others, and participate in innovative activities (Juan et al., 2018).

Another theory which was proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1980s is self-determination theory, which posits that workers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, such as relatedness, competence and autonomy, impact knowledge creation. The theory also focuses on how cultural and social factors undermine or facilitate people's sense of initiative and violation. Employee engagement, according to this theory, can accelerate knowledge creation by meeting employees' psychological needs, such as a sense of ownership, belonging and mastery in their job (Liu and Yao, 2017).

The third theory is dynamic capacity theory, which asserts that knowledge creation is a critical component of an organization's capacity to adapt to changing environments and generate value (Teece et al., 1997). Employee involvement, according to this approach, can facilitate knowledge creation by improving organizational learning processes such as exploration and exploitation (March, 1991). Exploration is the process of creating new and diversified knowledge via experimenting and risk-taking. The refining and usage of existing knowledge via efficiency and dependability is referred to as exploitation. Employee engagement may help to balance these two processes by encouraging originality and curiosity on the one hand, while also assuring consistency and high standards on the other (Liu et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of knowledge creation and employee engagement. The study discovered three primary themes that emerged from the analysis based on a thorough literature assessment of pertinent articles:

- The dimensions and processes of knowledge creation,
- The antecedents of employee engagement,
- The difficulties and possibilities for supporting knowledge creation and employee engagement.

The paper explored the theoretical and practical ramifications of these findings, as well as directions and limitations for future research objectives. According to the study, knowledge creation is a crucial driver of employee engagement since it allows people to grow their skills, share their thoughts, cooperate with others, and contribute to company goals.

## Policy recommendations

Based on a study of the research on the link between knowledge creation and employee engagement, we provide some policy recommendations to organizations seeking to develop a culture of knowledge creation and employee engagement.

- Organizations should define their purpose and vision statements and effectively convey them to their personnel. This can assist workers to connect their job to the goals of the firm, increasing their sense of commitment and identity.
- Organizations should foster a friendly and collaborative work atmosphere in which workers may freely express their ideas, thoughts, and comments without fear of being judged or criticized.



Employees may learn from one another, produce fresh insights, and solve issues creatively, which can help the process of knowledge creation.

- Organizations should recognize and reward workers who contribute to knowledge creation and employee engagement. Recognition awards, promotions, bonuses, flexible work arrangements, or more time off are examples of financial and non-financial incentives. These incentives can drive employees to perform better, boost their job satisfaction, and decrease their desire to quit their jobs.

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