Employee development and employee engagement: a review and integrated model

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Abstract

Purpose – In response to the lack of connection between employee development and employee engagement, this study explores the existing empirical findings regarding these two concepts. Based on the conservation of resources theory, the authors propose a novel theoretical framework that can better leverage the identified antecedents and relationships for future research.

Design/methodology/approach – An integrative literature review of 64 empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals was conducted.

Findings – Three different levels of antecedents, including the work environment, social exchange and individual characteristics, are identified. Employee development and employee engagement exhibit reciprocal relationships. Considering the role of job performance as a catalyst, the authors propose an upward gain spiral model to advance both research and practice.

Originality/value – This integrative literature review aims to facilitate discussions based on three distinct sub-dimensions: physical, emotional and cognitive energies, relevant to both employee development and employee engagement. Through this distinction, a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between employee development and employee engagement can be cultivated.

Keywords Employee development, Employee engagement, Job performance, Conservation of resources, Gain spirals

Recently in the workplace, the nature of work has been undergoing unprecedented changes, driven by the advent of new technologies or the increasing demands for nontraditional gig worker arrangements (Retkowsky et al., 2023). Employees are now required to reskill and retool to maintain their career goal progress and employability in the volatile labor market (Baruch and Sullivan, 2022). Employee development has become even more critical in responding to the constant pressures stemming from technological advancements and skills deficiency issues.

Employee development in today’s workplace occurs on a continuous basis and entails a wide variety of activities, including training workshops as well as job experiences, self-directed learning and social interactions with people inside and outside the organization (Noe et al., 2014). Because employee development primarily occurs in the work contexts without specific

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guidance by an instructor, the important role of human agency that can direct employees themselves in the learning processes is highlighted (Bandura, 2001; Goller and Billett, 2014).

Scholars have emphasized employee engagement as a psychological state, in which employees actively participate in employee development with a high level of human agency (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). Prior research on employee engagement has identified various formal and informal employee development activities as job resources that positively influence employee engagement (Bakker and Leiter, 2010; Maden, 2015). Furthermore, engaged employees who consistently expand their capacity feel a sense of competence and efficacy (Joo et al., 2019).

While employee development and employee engagement are closely related in terms of elevating employees’ resourcefulness, expertise and performance, only a few studies have endeavored to explore those two concepts’ solid connection and value to each other (e.g. Huo and Boxall, 2022; Susomrith and Coetzer, 2019). Some empirical studies have proposed a unidirectional causal relationship, indicating that if an organization provides employees with employee development activities, it would eventually lead to higher employee engagement (e.g. Memon et al., 2021). This simplified approach circumscribes our understandings of the dynamic interplay between employee development and employee engagement and overlooks potential reversed and cyclical relationships.

We address the gaps in the literature by drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory. The essential principle of the COR theory is that employees aim to conserve their possessed resource while acquiring new resources to facilitate their goal achievement (Hobfoll, 2001; Halbesleben et al., 2014). When employees encounter skill depreciation that leads to decreased job performance, they invest in employee development as a coping strategy to mitigate resource loss and secure future resources (Dachner et al., 2021). In this context, Halbesleben et al. (2014) highlighted that employees should “strategically” determine how to allocate their resource investment to enhance employee engagement. That being said, it is important to consider various individual characteristics and organizational environments when making resource investment decisions for employee development.

The purpose of this integrative literature review is to explore the relationships between employee development and employee engagement through an analysis of the existing empirical studies. We classify the antecedents that influence the relationships between employee development and employee engagement and identify how employee development is related to employee engagement and vice versa. Finally, we propose an upward gain spiral model that integrates employee development, employee engagement and job performance.

Theoretical backgrounds

Conservation of resources

The COR theory emphasizes the importance of resources in an employee’s work-related motivation for goal attainment (Hobfoll, 2001). Resources encompass everything that aids in achieving goals, including objects (e.g. tools for work), conditions (e.g. job security), personal resources (e.g. trait, energies and knowledge and skills; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Unlike resources that can be instantly replenished upon demand (e.g. physical energy) or remain relatively stable in nature (e.g. personal trait), knowledge and skills are cultivated over time through facing a diverse array of challenges and demands, particularly through learning by doing in the workplace (Wolfson et al., 2018). While resources could be considered on a short-term basis to be consumed, employee development in the workplace tends to occur in episodic, nonlinear and long-lasting manners (Sitzmann and Weinhardt, 2018).

Given these distinctive characteristics of knowledge and skills as resources, the concept of a resource caravan becomes significant, indicating that resources exist collectively across various levels including an individual, teams and the organization, rather than in isolation
Resource caravans exemplify a pattern, where a variety of resources could come together while associating between individual resources and environmental conditions. When resources can reinforce each other, a resource caravan can promote employee development as a coping behavior. More employee development activities can engage employees by helping them navigate changes in knowledge and skills. This cumulative nature of resource gains can eventually lead to the development of systemic motivating mechanisms known as resource gain spirals.

**Employee development**

Employee development involves “the expansion of an individual’s capacity to function effectively in his or her present or future job and work organization” (McCaulley and Hezlett, 2001, p. 314). Employee development includes both the formal classroom and informal workplace settings where learning occurs (Dachner et al., 2021). Formal learning has a prescribed learning framework (e.g. time, sequence, objectives and assessment) that is delivered by an instructor in a residential, online, or virtual learning environment in the workplace; this may take the form of a lecture-based course, an online course, structured on-the-job training or a formal coaching and mentoring program (Bell et al., 2017). Informal learning largely takes place in the same context in which it is expected to be applied: employees shadow tacit skills, share information and exchange performance feedback (Wolfson et al., 2018). Specifically, Noe et al. (2014) suggested that informal learning stems from (1) oneself (e.g. reflection and self-experimentation), (2) others (e.g. learning with a supervisor, colleague or internal/external expert) and (3) noninterpersonal sources (e.g. reading and social media).

Recent conceptualizations of employee development have emphasized proactive, conscious and autonomous learner agency rather than passive acceptance of prescribed knowledge or incidental learning that occurs on an ad-hoc and non-institutionalized basis (Bell et al., 2017; Dachner et al., 2021; Wolfson et al., 2018). While highlighting the intentionality of active learners, Billett (1996) stressed the importance of “learning through goal-directed activity situated in circumstances which are authentic, in terms of the intended application of the learned knowledge” (p. 263). Likewise, employee development is a purposive goal-oriented process in which active, intentional learners understand what to learn, where they should be headed and why they should take specific actions (Sitzmann and Weinhardt, 2018).

**Employee engagement**

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined the concept of engagement at work as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (p. 74). Vigor, as a form of physical engagement, is characterized by a high level of energy, a willingness to invest effort at work and mental resiliency used to complete work. Dedication, representing emotional engagement, pertains to a strong commitment to work and the experience of enthusiasm, pride and challenge. Absorption, associated with cognitive engagement, involves a positive state of being deeply and happily immersed in work, often experiencing difficulty in detaching from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This three-dimensional conceptualization and measurement of employee engagement assumes that employee engagement is fully realized when all three dimensions are present simultaneously (Bakker and Leiter, 2010).

In research on the nature of employee engagement, two different views generally emerge. Some scholars view employee engagement as durable or stable throughout work and life (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Yet employee engagement is based on the assumption of a dynamic psychological state. Comprised of momentary and transient experiences, an
individual’s level of employee engagement may rapidly fluctuate over short periods of time (e.g. from hour to hour or from day to day). Since employee engagement is exhibited when an employee simultaneously invests cognitive, emotional and physical energies into their work, the employee’s level of employee engagement is not consistent throughout the day (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). Prior diary studies have illuminated the within-person fluctuations in daily and weekly employee engagement levels and the sensitivity of employee engagement to inner motivation and external stimuli (Xanthopoulou et al., 2012).

This within-person perspective of employee engagement is closely related to employee development, which may exhibit varying learning curves throughout a single day and over an extended timeframe. Employee development and employee engagement may demonstrate that they are both activated at specific periods of time and not all moments are equal (Bakker and Leiter, 2010; Sitzmann and Weinhardt, 2018).

Methodology
This study’s initial search took place in November 2022 across multiple databases (i.e. PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals and ABI/INFORM Complete). We used the combinations of keywords employee development and employee engagement, along with interchangeable terms such as “training,” “learning,” “development,” “formal learning,” “informal learning,” “workplace learning,” “knowledge creation” and “knowledge sharing” as well as “work engagement,” “job engagement,” “personal engagement,” “organizational engagement” and “psychological engagement.” Additionally, we applied the following search conditions: articles written in English and classified as scholarly journals.

The staged-review process (Torraco, 2005) that we conducted included four stages: initial screening, full-text review, discussion and resolution of disagreements and final selection. First, an initial search yielded a total of 1,409 articles in the initial screening stage. To focus on employees’ job-related attitudes and behaviors in a work context, we included only articles published in the research fields of human resources, psychology and management. To address concerns for the possibility of missing significant articles, we conducted a comprehensive article search using Google Scholar. The four authors reviewed the abstracts of 353 articles and additional articles found through a Google Scholar search using the following criteria: (1) inclusion of empirical studies with both quantitative and qualitative designs, while excluding conceptual papers and literature reviews, (2) focusing on research related to a work context, encompassing both public and private organizations. Schools, hospitals, and police organizations were also included if they had a focus on the working context and (3) giving special attention to the conceptualization of employee development in the context of each study. We selected articles that covered a variety of situations and activities aimed at stimulating employee learning and development in the workplace, such as reflection, coaching and the learning climate.

Throughout this process, 96 publications were chosen for full-text review. During this stage, the four authors collaboratively screened the full text articles, selecting only the most relevant articles for analysis. Articles that merely mentioned the phenomena of employee development and employee engagement without providing in-depth or pertinent discussion were excluded. In cases of ambiguity regarding suitability, all the authors provided their input. After several meetings to discuss and resolve disagreements, 59 studies were chosen for the final analysis. Additionally, this article selection process was repeated during the revision process of the CDI journal in August 2023 to include recent articles published after the initial search period. This resulted in the addition of six articles to the list. Figure 1 presents the schematic process of the literature search and selection.

After identifying the final 64 articles, all authors collaborated in creating a table that provides detailed information about the selected articles including author, theory/theoretical
framework, antecedent, mediator and/or moderator, dependent variable, measurement of engagement, context, sample, industry and methods (see Supplemental material). The completed table was reviewed again by another author to ensure the accuracy of the information.

Findings
Through the review of selected articles from the existing literature, we offer an integrative literature review that summarizes and synthesizes the relationships between employee development and employee engagement.

Antecedents affecting the relationships between employee development and employee engagement

Work environment. Researchers examining the contextual antecedents that affect the relationships between employee development and employee engagement have primarily focused on learning climate and job autonomy.

Learning climate. While several studies have examined the impacts of the environment, culture and climate in relation to employee development and employee engagement, an organization’s learning climate is the most frequently examined antecedent. A positive perceived learning climate can motivate employees to acquire new skills to help them achieve work-related goals and pursue personal growth for career advancement (Eldor and Harpaz, 2016). Islam and Tariq (2018) highlighted the learning climate as having a positive influence on knowledge sharing through employee engagement. Song et al. (2018) found that a learning organization’s culture affected job performance through the mediating effects of self-efficacy and employee engagement.

Job autonomy. A well-designed job can promote an engaged employee’s willingness to learn (Oldham and Hackman, 2010). Job autonomy serves as a pivotal job characteristic for employee development and employee engagement. In Bujacz et al.’s (2017) study, job control (creativity, learning and autonomy) was found to be related to employee engagement for both self-employed and organizationally employed individuals. Salanova et al. (2005) found that although organizational resources (training, autonomy and technology) were not related to service climate, employee engagement fully mediated the relationship between organizational resources and service climate.
Social exchange. Due to the underlying social exchange mechanisms between an organization and its employees, which enable both entities to influence each other simultaneously, it is crucial for employees to receive social support from their supervisors and colleagues, foster trust among themselves and ensure that supervisors and colleagues are actively involved in implementing what employees learn from developmental opportunities within the workplace (Rozkwitalska et al., 2022). Without such sufficient organizational support, employee development that occurs outside of the workplace is often prone to abandonment (Noe et al., 2014).

Several studies have emphasized the importance of receiving support from one’s organization and leaders. Kumar et al. (2018) demonstrated a positive direct effect of managerial support for development on employee engagement and identified a mediating effect of organizational support for development in the relationship between managerial support for development and employee engagement. Nikolova et al. (2019) discovered that engaging leadership is not related to learning opportunities in the hospitality sector. This contrasting result suggests that the high proportion of contingent workers may weaken the connection between support from the leaders and employee development, which is typically established through social exchange mechanisms.

Individual characteristics. Van den Broeck et al. (2011) suggested that employees not only view employee development as job resources but also draw on their own attitudes toward learning as personal resources. Some employees are more ready than others to seize learning opportunities in particular contexts. Several personal characteristics have been examined, such as hardiness (Guglielmi et al., 2019). Among them, scholars have paid particular attention to learning goal orientation as a critical individual characteristic. Performance and learning goal orientations refer to how and why an employee achieves a work objective (Seijts et al., 2004). Unlike performance goal orientation, which focuses on an employee achieving normative-based standards, learning goal orientation value the pursuit of improving and mastering novel job-related skills. Maden (2015) identified the mediating role of learning goal orientation between employee engagement and feedback inquiry. Engaged employees tend to actively seek and participate in learning opportunities (Bakker et al., 2012; Sonnentag, 2003).

Employee development for employee engagement

We found that employee development activities that promote employee engagement generally are broken into two categories: formal and informal learning activities.

Formal learning activities. Several studies have consistently reported a strong positive influence of training participation and employees’ satisfaction with training on employee engagement. Kumar et al. (2018) discovered that employees who had opportunities from the organization and manager to develop their knowledge, skills and capabilities were more satisfied with their jobs and more engaged, and less likely to leave. Salanova et al. (2005) and Huo and Boxall (2022) identified training as a job resource and demonstrated its positive association with employee engagement. Memon et al. (2021) and Fletcher (2016) found that training satisfaction positively influences employee engagement.

Informal learning activities. Reflection, feedback, coaching, knowledge sharing and workplace interaction are all crucial informal employee development activities that have been empirically identified as antecedents of employee engagement. In Ali Abadi et al. (2023)’s study, learning from oneself, learning from others and learning from non-interpersonal sources are positively associated with employee engagement. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009a) found that coaching had a lagged indirect effect on subsequent employee engagement through optimism. Cooper-Thomas et al. (2014) showed that newcomers’ proactive behaviors (e.g. feedback seeking, relationship building and role modeling) predicted higher levels of employee engagement.
**Employee engagement for employee development**

Empirical studies have also revealed that employee engagement promotes employee development. Studies have reported that highly engaged employees partake in employee development and create or seek out learning resources and opportunities. Sonnentag (2003) showed that day-level employee engagement is a predictor of day-level personal initiative and day-level pursuit of learning. Bakker et al. (2012) found that employee engagement predicts active learning behaviors such as looking for new knowledge and methods. Nazli and Khairudin (2018) identified that employee engagement is positively related to employees’ intention to apply what they learn in the workplace from training participation.

**Consequences of employee development and employee engagement**

Many of the selected articles reported positive impacts of employee development and employee engagement on various organizational outcomes, particularly those related to employees’ attitudes and behaviors. Job performance has been examined as a consequence of employee development and employee engagement. Training and learning opportunities as job resources have shown a positive relationship with individual task performance through employee engagement (e.g. Salanova et al., 2005). Chughtai and Buckley (2011) demonstrated that employee engagement predicted learning goal orientation, subsequently leading to improvements in both in-role and extra-role performances.

Another variable that results from employee development and employee engagement is employees’ turnover intentions. Employee development activities reinforce employee engagement, thereby decreasing turnover intentions. Shuck et al. (2014) identified that support for participation in training and career management programs is positively related to cognitive, emotional and behavioral facets of employee engagement, while being negatively related to turnover intention.

**Relationships among employee development, employee engagement and cognate antecedents and outcomes**

A limited number of scholars have examined the reciprocal relationship that forms over time between employee development, employee engagement and job performance, drawing on from the perspective of gain spirals. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009b) found that job resources (e.g. opportunities for professional development, supervisory coaching, social support and autonomy) and personal resources (e.g. self-efficacy, organizational-based self-esteem and optimism) and employee engagement mutually strengthen each other over time. Guglielmi et al. (2019) identified a gain cycle involving employee engagement and job and personal resources. Within this gain cycle, learning opportunities as job resources amplified employee engagement, subsequently enhancing the availability of further learning opportunities. Bakker and Bal (2010) found that employees equipped with job resources (opportunities for development, supervisory coaching, feedback, autonomy and social support) became more engaged in their work roles, leading to improved performance and increased job resources.

Our review of empirical research on employee development and employee engagement in best presented in the following Figure 2.

**An upward gain spiral model**

Throughout our integrative literature review, we noted that while studies have empirically reported a positive association between employee development and employee engagement, further efforts are needed to elucidate the direction or reciprocal relationships between these two concepts. Building upon our findings, we propose an upward gain spiral model that integrates these concepts with job performance (see Figure 3).
In the upward gain spiral, the central circle represents the resource caravan, which serves as the foundation for combinations between environmental conditions and individual resources necessary to sustain the cyclical and reciprocal relationships. The upward gain spiral model also comprises gain cycles and spirals. Gain cycles represent positive bidirectional relationships (i.e. A is positively associated with B and B is positively associated with A). More importantly, gain spirals involve systematic increases (i.e. A1 < A2 < A3 and B1 < B2 < B3) that mutually reinforce each other positively over time (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). These gain spirals are accompanied by systematic changes, which together serve as momentum for employees to believe that the changes in employee development and employee engagement will be sustained (Lindsley et al., 1995). Engaged employees positively evaluate the estimated time, effort and job resources
available for employee development (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). When employees believe that these positive circumstances are likely to persist, they are more motivated to develop their competencies by acquiring new skills and knowledge (Dweck, 1986).

Job performance can catalyze upward gain spirals by strengthening an employee’s efficacy belief, which is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviors required (Bandura, 2001). Once an employee masters achievable learning goals that result in positive outcomes, their gain spirals may be uplifted before and after the job performance. Cumulative resource investment can be rapidly realized, thereby increasing the resource pools (e.g. time, energy and rewards) and encouraging engaged employees to pursue further resource gains through employee development (Hobfoll, 2001).

In conceptualizing the upward gain spiral model, a performance episodic approach is employed, which aligns well with the within-person fluctuations in employee engagement and non-linear characteristics of employee development (Beal et al., 2005). While job performance has often been perceived as a singular endpoint, and employees fully commit their resources to maximize likelihood of achieving their ultimate goal, from the performance episodic perspective, job performance is better understood as a cyclic process, involving a sequence of repeated subgoals (Beal et al., 2005). Altogether, employee development serves as a responsive feedback and adaptation process and employee engagement functions as a temporal psychological and physical energy source. Job performance is manifested as accumulated small wins over time and as a catalyst in forming gain spirals.

Discussion
To promote the upward gain spirals in the workplace, it is necessary for future research to delve into how employee development and employee engagement can be further integrated. We particularly discuss how relevant adult learning perspectives can guide future research by suggesting three planes across which employee development unfolds: (1) physical energy, (2) positive emotion and (3) higher-order thinking.

Physical energy
One of the scholarly interests in adult learning is the exploration of how the human body and its physical and organic mechanisms signal emotion, cognition and behavior, and ultimately, how learning takes place within the body (Merriam and Bierema, 2013; Tobin and Tisdell, 2015). This interest responds to prior literature that focuses on cognition and emotion in learning at the expense of physical energy. It aligns with research on employee engagement, which underscores the importance of vigor (Shirom, 2007). Vigor acts as a source of physical energy for employee development, enabling employees to acquire and accumulate resources to address skill-related demands (Hobfoll, 2001; Sonnentag, 2003). When employees are highly invigorated, they are inclined to invest physical energy into employee development activities. The sense of accomplishment derived from these activities can subsequently aid employees in enhancing their physical energy levels.

Furthermore, the ego-depletion theory suggests that an employee’s physical energy is not infinite; it becomes depleted when they are exposed to a constant and intense levels of self-control and decision-making (Baumeister, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018), which is often the case during employee development activities. Employee development in the workplace may be a strenuous and prolonged process that entails both physical and psychological stressors. The time, resources and organizational support necessary to sustain employee development efforts are frequently inadequate (Noe et al., 2010). Consequently, employee may perceive employee development as an additional job demand that contribute to cycles of resource loss.

In this context, it is crucial to explore how employees’ physical energy interacts with their learning, development and growth. Thriving is an adjacent concept of employee engagement,
representing a psychological state involving “a sense of progress or forward movement in one’s self-development” (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538). Employees who are thriving can experience both vitality (i.e. having energy while feeling alive) and learning (i.e. acquiring and applying valuable knowledge and skills) in their work (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). Further theoretical exploration grounded in both employee engagement and thriving is necessary to examine the nature of relationships between physical energy and employee development.

**Positive emotion**

Dedication, the emotional dimension of employee engagement underscores that employees can be engaged in when they find significance and meaning in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This emotional drive is fostered by their job identification, where they view their job as a complete reflection of their personal identity (Hatak et al., 2015). Despite the acknowledged fluctuations in employee engagement over time, this strong job identification could enable employees to persistently pursue a selected course of action over time (Seo et al., 2004; Sitzmann and Weinhardt, 2018). When skill redevelopment is necessary, dedicated employees are willing to enhance their job competencies through employee development.

In the contemporary organizational context, employee development is best conceived as a process integrated into everyday workplace practices, relationships and dynamics through a self-regulated learning approach (Sitzmann and Weinhardt, 2018; Wolfson et al., 2018). Self-regulated learning encompasses a sequence of actions, including setting learning goals, formulating learning strategies, exerting effort and then, receiving and adapting based on feedback by themselves (Bell and Kozlowski, 2008). Because even the self-regulated learning of highly dedicated employees can be easily interrupted by internal and external factors, it could be facilitated by receiving support from colleagues and leaders as well as through the implementation of rewards to accomplish learning goals (Sitzmann and Weinhardt, 2018).

Likewise, the emotional dimension of employee engagement should be explored in alignment with the resource caravan. Indeed, dedication is initially conceptualized as an antithesis of cynicism within the sub-dimension of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002). While cynicism prompts employees to display negative attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, dedicated employees believe they can control demanding situations and solicit support from the organization (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006). Without this positive association between employees’ human agency and organizational resources, dedication could potentially erode into cynicism (Maslach and Leiter, 1997).

**Higher-order thinking**

From a cognitive perspective of employee engagement, absorption is similar to the concept of flow, which refers to a state of subjective experiential immersion in an activity, leading to intense enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Cognitive engagement emerges when a high degree of skills is used to address challenging tasks (Hamari et al., 2016). Educational technology research regarding games and simulations has explored this theoretical stance, demonstrating that learners are significantly more engaged and concentrate better when challenged to learn and use new skills (Admiraal et al., 2011). Various psychological states are associated with different levels of challenges and skills: (1) apathy (i.e. low challenge and low skill), (2) relaxation (i.e. high skill but low challenge), (3) anxiety (i.e. high challenge but low skill) and (4) flow (i.e. high challenge combined with high skill; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Employee development should consider the employee’s skill level so that it is neither too simple nor too difficult. Developmental goals can be stretched, but employees should have a reasonable chance of success at attaining them (Admiraal et al., 2011). Education scholars (e.g. Bloom, 1956) have noted different levels of cognition, effort and engagement, ranging from lower-order thinking skills (recall and comprehension) to higher-order thinking skills.
(analysis, synthesis and evaluation). We argue that employee development activities designed to use employees’ higher-order thinking skills can promote cognitive engagement. Problem-based learning or action learning provides meaningful challenges that generate higher-order thinking and experiential learning provides ample opportunities for reflection through trial and error, novel pathways and post-action reviews (Scott, 2017).

Implications for research
Employee development is a multidimensional phenomenon. However, in most quantitative studies reviewed here, employee development variables were measured as a type of job resource by merging multiple employee development-related items into a single higher-order construct (latent constructs with single variables; Johnson et al., 2011). Despite the benefits of construct clarity and conciseness, using summed constructs may cause a substantial loss of information, thereby prohibiting researchers from demonstrating the validity of multidimensional aspects of employee development. To advance quantitative research related to employee engagement, a research design that captures the dynamic nature of employee development and its measurement strategy is required.

The upward gain spiral model highlights the positive and cyclical expansion among employee development, engagement and performance in the organizational contexts. To extend the traditional linear relationship among psychological variables in the JD-R model, a longitudinal research design (e.g. latent growth modeling [LGM]) that can show the persistent growth of employee engagement as a result of accumulated resources and employee development are recommended. Alongside the benefits of the longitudinal research design, diary data enables investigations into short-term fluctuations, such as daily, weekly or monthly variations in one’s job attitudes (Gross et al., 2013). For example, LGM using diary data can help illustrate the presence of loss-gain resource dynamics.

Surprisingly, only one qualitative research study on this topic has been conducted (Shuck et al., 2011). In fact, reciprocity and accumulated gain spirals are hard to measure reliably and precisely using quantitative research designs. Reciprocity may show stochastic and non-linear dynamics. Such phenomena are highly influenced by the sociocultural process of human interactions between individuals and their contexts. To identify the dynamics of reciprocal relationships, qualitative research, particularly that which takes the form of phenomenological and ethnographic approaches, should be conducted. This research would allow scholars to describe and interpret employees’ lived experiences within specific cultural contexts.

Implications for practice
In recent decades, there has been a noticeable increase in employee development interventions aimed at enhancing employee engagement. These interventions include training programs related to mental health (e.g. mindfulness training) and coping behaviors (e.g. leadership skills training), which are expected to foster positive psychological states at the individual level. While the individual-level interventions may be a temporal tonic to boost employee engagement, they often fall short in addressing the fundamental factors behind sustained employee engagement and organizational climate for employee development, which are influenced by changes in employees’ work circumstances. Instead of solely focusing on individuals, organizations could consider conducting organization development (OD) practices that involve employees in interventions, encouraging them to collaboratively work together to discover solutions at the organizational level.

We found that employee development, employee engagement and job performance should be examined from both state-level and within-person perspectives due to their temporal dynamics. This aligns with the trend of using pulse surveys in global corporations for talent
development. Pulse surveys are short, more frequent, and can be completed at any time to supplement traditional annual, large-scale organizational surveys (Brown, 2022). Since employees are not equally engaged, not always willing to participate in developmental activities and may not consistently strive for job performance improvement, pulse surveys are increasingly applied to capture the dynamics in employees’ attitudes and behaviors and to facilitate timely interventions to maintain high performance.

**Conclusion**
Recognizing that organizations need evidence-based guidance to align employee development and employee engagement with performance improvement, this study synthesizes empirical research on the relevant literature. The proposed upward gain spiral model captures how those three concepts impact one another, supported by resource caravan. Our discussion of theoretical implications also explores how physical energy, positive emotion, higher-order thinking can further enrich building up the upward gain spiral model. Future research examining relationships among resource caravan, employee development, employee engagement and job performance will help managers and HR to better evaluate the effectiveness of each construct toward one another.

**References**


Supplementary material
The supplementary materials for this article can be found online.

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