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THE CRISIS OF ENGAGEMENT AT WORK: CHALLENGES FOR MANAGERS

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Purpose: The aim is to identify the crucial factors for employee engagement in the work environment and determine the challenges for managers that stem from it. As a theoretical framework, the concept of work engagement was used, which defines engagement as a positive and active state related to well-being and psychological presence at work.
Methodology: A scoping review of literature was employed (Scopus, Web of Science) covering the years 2018-2025 in the fields of management and psychology. The search was conducted using the keyword "work engagement". After duplicate removal (N = 868 records), a multi-stage selection was carried out. The criterion for inclusion was empirical research identifying the determinants of work engagement. Ultimately, a total of 24 papers was selected for analysis.
Findings: The analysis confirmed the central role of mental well-being as an intermediary mechanism between the work environment and the level of engagement. Workplace resources were identified as the key antecedents of work engagement and divided into four categories: (1) work qualities; (2) leadership qualities; (3) psychosocial processes in the organization; and (4) factors related to the digital transformation of the work environment.
Research limitations: A limiting aspect of the method stems from the specific nature of scoping review, suitable for organizing knowledge, but failing to provide meta-analysis. Decisions regarding database selection and inclusion criteria may result in the exclusion of part of publications.
Practical implications: The paper offers managers a structured map of work resources vital for building an environment that fosters well-being and long-term employee engagement and identifies areas for intervention.
Social implications: Enhancing workplace resources that improve work engagement may lower the risk of professional burnout and foster long-term quality of life of employees.
Originality: A classification of workplace resource determinants of work engagement is presented in the context of employee well-being and psychological presence. This approach helps to organize dispersed research findings and formulate coherent recommendations for managerial practice.
Keywords: work engagement, well-being, work environment, managerial challenges.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The issues of work engagement mark a broad area of consideration among theorists and practitioners of management. A specific level of engagement determines the range of effort put into work, the motivation to collaborate with others, industriousness and innovation; hence, it shapes productivity and quality. A highly engaged employee is of indisputable value for every organization. Having knowledge about employee engagement seems crucial for today's managers, a fact reflected in the high number of studies.

Earlier research in this field, though very heterogenous due to centering on different aspects of employee activity, generally concerned explaining the phenomenon of engagement and its relation to workplace behavior. It dates back to the 1960s, with the 1980s and the 1990s being a period of its rapid growth.

Currently, in the third decade of the 21st century, a renewed interest in work engagement can be observed. It came to be a vital field of research again due to the growing phenomenon of decreased engagement and the weakened employee-organization relationship. These shifts indicate a crisis of work engagement. This leads to major losses of human resources, which in volatile and unpredictable conditions may threaten the organization's competitiveness.

The paper focuses on the current issue of low employee engagement, its determinants, and, above all, the challenges it poses for managers in modern organizations. As a theoretical basis for determining the desired managerial behaviors, the concept of work engagement was used as one most related to the aspects of engaging workplace environment and psychological presence in the workplace. To achieve the goal outlined, taking into consideration the vast and diverse pool of available empirical literature, the method of scoping review was selected. The survey conducted enabled the identification of the key factors for engaged activity in a workplace sensitive to employee well-being and organizational community.

2. Conditions for and Manifestations of Decreased Employee

A decrease in employee engagement and a weakened sense of work commitment are related to a number of factors. Of key importance are the changing attitudes to work and the rejection of "the cult of self-sacrifice" in favor of self-actualization (Kundi, Hollet-Haudebert, Peterson 2021). Employees are shifting from a traditional, linear career trajectory; they are willing to design their professional future themselves and they commit to a single organization less frequently. They view work through the lens of subjectively valued factors that contribute to their personal development and maintaining boundaries and balance in life (Posklinsky, 2025; Adamska-Chudzińska, Blachnicka, 2025). As a result, the lack of conditions to cater to their needs decreases the level of work engagement.

Low employee engagement is also a reaction to the current global sociopolitical instability. Events such as the pandemic, military conflicts, technological pressure, and economic volatility, referred to as "macro-level turbulence", triggered in some employees a sense of persistent anxiety and insecurity of living conditions (Martinescu et al., 2024). The awareness of the fragility of human life has increased and so has the need for a higher quality in all its spheres, including – the professional one. This, in turn, raised the level of employee expectations. Seeking security in the diversity of experiences acquired in many companies, they redefine the notion of success by associating it with mitigation of potential risks.

Thus, the job market reveals two disparate perspectives: that of employees, especially the younger cohorts, and that of employers with established principles of organizational management. Young employees wish to pursue careers unrestricted by the confines of a single company, based on their subjective sense of development and experience of joy in their professional and private lives (Solarczyk-Ambrozik, 2015). Meanwhile, the employers' limited capacity to meet these expectations and a concurrent rigidity and schematic nature of the principles for running a business reveal a major disconnect between employee aspirations and what employers offer (Randstad, 2026).

The consequences of the discrepancy between managers' attitudes toward meeting business objectives and employee expectations are reflected in the trends of decreased work engagement in the job market. After the pandemic, a trend emerged known as the "great resignation" (Serenko, 2023), and it resulted in mass resignations of employees. There are various factors behind the multitude of reasons to quit; however, these boiled down to seeking greater comfort in balancing work and private life, friendly atmosphere in the workplace, and better remuneration.

Relatively soon, the said trend was replaced with that of "quiet quitting" (Klotz, Bolino, 2022), which with an ever grater force revealed the fall in employee engagement and their non-commitment to the organization. The concept of this phenomenon does not involve resigning from work; instead, it consists in doing the bare minimum of responsibilities to avoid being made redundant, during the standard working hours only, and without any emotional involvement (Patel et al., 2025).

Another currently growing trend, that of “The Great Detachment" (Wigert, Tatel, 2024), has a broader social dimension, for what it involves is not a lowered level of commitment to a specific job, but a general attitude of psychological detachment from the employer, fueled by frustration and professional burnout. It involves situations when employees, despite willing to quit, feel imprisoned in their uninspiring roles. In a sense, it is their strategy for dealing with an unfavorable work environment (e.g., meaninglessness, frustration, the pressure of remote work) and managerial practices incongruent with their expectations.

Table 1 presents the data demonstrating the scale of the problem with work engagement, based on a Gallup report (2025). In Europe, a staggering 72% of the workforce are disengaged employees who opt for “quiet quitting” or “The Great Detachment”, with only 13% being fully

committed. Concurrently, in Poland, the percentage of fully engaged employees ranks among the lowest in Europe, at merely 8%. The indicators regarding disengaged and actively disengaging employees highlight the severity of the problem.

Table 1.
Work engagement of employees

Region / Country	Disengaged / "Quiet quitting / The Great detachment"	Actively disengaging ("Loud quitting")	Fully engaged
USA and Canada	52%	17%	31%
World	62%	17%	21%
Europe	72%	15%	13%

Source: own work based on: (Gallup, 2025)

The indicated phenomena of "quiet quitting" and "The Great Detachment", albeit subtle and often difficult to notice at first glance, carry far reaching negative consequences for organizational efficiency related to making a limited use of the potential of employees, especially those with desired qualifications, specialist knowledge, and much experience. Low engagement costs the global economy $8.8 trillion a year, i.e., 9% of the global GDP (Gallup, 2024). These losses consist not only of untapped productivity, lost profits and customers, but also psychological costs on the part of employees related to the discomfort stemming from energy drain, wasted potential, and the lack of meaningful results. The two types of losses are interconnected and further fuel the problem.

3. Methods

The analysis of the conditions of decreased work engagement has demonstrated that counteracting the crisis requires changes in managerial practices geared towards employee well-being. The identified research problem consisted in the knowledge on the key determinants of workplace environment that fosters engagement not having been adequately structured. The goal of the study was therefore to identify and schematize the factors relevant for shaping a balanced and engaging workplace environment.

To solve the research problem and meet the research goal, a scoping review was used, a method suitable for a vast and scattered literature scattered (Peterson et al., 2017), and considered useful for practitioners. The method allows for the recognition of the phenomenon and its determinants (Ćwiklicki, 2020) via the following stages: (1) the formulation of the research question; (2) the identification of sources; (3) the selection of studies; (4) the record of studies; (5) the summary of the results; and (6) the discussion of the results (facultative). These stages helped define the respective phases of the research conducted.

In the first stage, a theoretical framework was selected that could serve as the basis for the holistic shaping of change intended to incorporate aspects of psychological well-being into the practice of management. Considering the diversity of approaches to engagement and the interpretive inconsistency resulting therefrom, the results of a prior study were used (Adamska-Chudzińska, Andraszak, 2025); it was a comparison of the constructs of: "work engagement", "organizational commitment", and "job involvement". On such a basis, it was decided that the psychosocial presence of employees in the organization is best reflected in the concept of "work engagement", as it is associated strongly with well-being and positive emotions experienced in the workplace. The consistency of the findings with the subject of the research justified the choice of this concept as the foundation for seeking solutions to the engagement crisis. The following research question was proposed: What factors influence the shaping of a work environment that fosters full work engagement?

The second stage consisted in the identification of literature sources with materials relevant for the research question. It was decided that two databases would be used: Scopus and the Web of Science. As a keyword, the construct name of "work engagement" was used. The limitation involved: the years 2018–2025, publications in English, and the academic field of management and psychology. The query returned 755 hits in Scopus and 473 hits in the Web of Science. After duplicate removal, the total number of records stood at 868.

As the third stage, a multi-stage selection of studies was performed: first on the basis of their titles and abstracts' relation to the research question, and subsequently based on an analysis of the content of papers that elucidate the role of the determinants of "work engagement". The selection also incorporated a critical evaluation and data saturation related to the reproducibility of factors. Ultimately, a total of 24 papers focused on situational and individual factors influencing work engagement was selected for analysis.

The fourth stage consisted in registering the research via a narrative record of predetermined variables, systematically differentiating between situational and individual factors. Such a layout made it possible to impose on the data a preliminary structure oriented towards identifying job resources (qualities of the work situation) and individual resources. The fifth stage, analytical in nature, was intended as a synthesis of the results. A strong correlation was confirmed between "work engagement" and employee well-being as well as psychological presence in the workplace. Further analyses were aimed at structuring the factors determining work engagement and specifying their relevance for shaping an engaging work environment. Indicated as the main antecedents of the state of work engagement were job resources (qualities of the situation), subsequently subject to categorization (Table 2).

4. Selected results

Empirical literature on shaping work engagement unequivocally indicates the fundamental role of the mental well-being of employees. The survey conducted confirmed that engagement and well-being in the workplace are mutually related (Prakash, Kashyap, 2021), while an employee in good mental shape engages in work completely and experiences satisfaction (Sypniewska et al., 2023). Researchers indicate (Schaufeli et al., 2002) that work engagement is "a positive, work-related state of mind that is associated with vigor, dedication, and absorption". Over the years of research, it has been corroborated that the state constitutes a positive and highly active form of employee well-being (Bakker, 2022).

Survey results also pointed to the mechanisms behind the correlation between well-being and engagement. The research by Sim et al. (2023) demonstrated that well-being serves as an intermediary element in the relationship between job requirements, social support, and engagement. This view is complemented by the findings reported by Brosch et al. (2024), according to whom a high level of well-being and engagement helps maintain long-term effects of regeneration and their endurance over time.

At the same time, numerous studies have indicated specific job resources that have a predictive function for well-being and work engagement. Organizational support (Lu et al., 2025) proved to be one of the crucial resources. Also important is a positive meaning of work: it alleviates the negative consequences in relationships with superiors (Han, Sears, 2024) and reinforces well-being in the conditions of digital transformation (Deng et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the research by Baquero (2023) points to the role of authentic leadership, which appears to foster well-being and work engagement mainly by virtue of relational transparency and sustainable information processing. One can draw similar conclusions from the research on empowerment-based leadership. It has been demonstrated that empowerment raises the level of engagement and strengthens the positive effects of innovative behaviors (Dwidienawati et al., 2025).

Another key factor in optimizing work engagement is job crafting and employees' ability to actively shape their work, which fosters its meaning and significance (Bakker, 2022). The research by Zhai et al. (2025) showed that job crafting serves as the central mechanism of a sequential path that involves professional identity, engagement, and well-being, by triggering processes that stimulate employees.

Theorists also emphasize the need for a holistic approach to the qualities of work (support from co-workers, meaningful tasks, autonomy) and leadership traits, including the relationship quality with superiors, and of the experience of transformational leadership (Mukaihata et al., 2020; Van Roekel et al., 2024). A synthesis of compelling evidence was offered by Bakker (2022), who indicated that work engagement results from psychosocial processes between the employee, manager, and colleagues, such as positive team interactions (Fortuin et al., 2021) as

well as relationship and communication improvement through supportive emotional interactions (Hoehl et al., 2021). The crucial role of positive emotions experienced in the workplace was further confirmed in the research of Gan et al. (2023).

The social dimension of fostering engagement was confirmed in a research demonstrating that pro-social environment enhances motivation and enthusiasm (Abid et al., 2018). A community atmosphere in the workplace decreases burnout levels and enhances engagement, laying the foundation for psychosocial safety (Jurek, Wyszomirska-Góra, 2025).

5. Synthesis of Identified Factors and Managerial Challenges

The juxtaposition of results of the studies analyzed confirmed that mental well-being is the central mechanism that mediates between workplace environment and the level of work engagement.

A series of well-being and work engagement predictors have been identified. The analyses enabled the differentiation between situational and individual factors. Work qualities were indicated as the main antecedent of engagement (Van Roekel et al., 2024); therefore, work resources are considered the determining factor for engagement development. While individual factors play a stimulating role and explain the variability of engagement from the point of view of personality traits, the key consideration remains to what extent the work environment allows employees to use their personal strengths (Bakker, 2018). According to the personal approach, some traits may generally predispose employees to engage in work (Rusu et al., 2020; Bakker, 2022); however, situational approach demonstrates that the level of engagement varies significantly depending on work environment qualities. In this study, a categorization is offered of the work resources identified, i.e., situational factors that determine well-being and engagement.

Based on the review, these were divided into four groups: work qualities, leadership qualities, psychosocial processes, and those related to digital transformation (Table 2). The factors listed in these categories complement one another in establishing the social context of work that fosters well-being and high levels of engagement. A workplace situation characterized by employee empowerment, meaningful tasks, autonomy, and elements of job crafting, as well as a friendly atmosphere continues to depend on managerial practices, corresponding psychosocial processes, and the way digital solutions are implemented. Their significance is revealed in employee experiences that holistically add up to well-being.

Table 2.
Categorization of work environment factors (work resources) determining well-being and work engagement

Work qualities	Leadership qualities	Psychosocial processes	Processes related to digital transformation
Employee empowerment	Transformational and authentic leadership	Organizational support	Positive impact of digital transformation
Meaning and significance of tasks	Enhancing meaningfulness and feedback	Community-orientedness and pro-social motivation	Adaptive use of technology
Autonomy and job crafting	Stimulation of independence and autonomy	Experience of respect and recognition (appreciation)	Technostress reduction
Pleasant workplace atmosphere	Quality of the manager-employee relationship	Emotion regulation in relationships	

Source: own work.

The aforementioned factors have been identified on the basis of the literature review. These do not exhaust all aspects relevant for shaping an emotionally supportive work environment. However, as the most often indicated by researchers, they have enabled the identification – with all due caution – of the key challenges for managers:

- Transformational and authentic leadership style – relational transparency and balanced information processing, inspirational attitudes.
- Orientation toward employee empowerment – respect, recognition, and the use of employees' specific traits and abilities.
- Entrusting socially important and meaningful tasks – task transparency, vision-based motivation, constructive feedback.
- Providing adequate autonomy and potential for job crafting – the recognition of employee identity, professional experience, and creative capabilities.
- Cultivating supportive workplace atmosphere (the foundation for psychosocial safety) – community-orientedness, organizational support, prosocial motivation, relevant team role, emotional regulation.
- Operating adaptively in the reality of AI – technostress reduction, positive significance of the digital transformation.

The challenges presented outline the directions of changes in employee management within contemporary organizations. What they mean in practice is the need to deliberately shape work resources through authentic and transformative leadership which fosters mental well-being and cultivates engagement. A balancing act between productivity requirements and employee empowerment becomes particularly important; it involves: increasing task meaningfulness, autonomy, and potential for job crafting, while at the same time cultivating an atmosphere of mental safety. Within the regime of digital transformation, managers ought to develop competences that foster adaptive use of technology and technostress reduction. Coherent synchronization of these areas brings about the experience of psychological presence in the workplace, which is a prerequisite for a highly engaged human capital.

6. Conclusions

From the considerations undertaken, it may be concluded that the origin of today's crisis of engagement should not be reduced to "demanding attitudes" or mere passing trends; instead, it should be conceived of as the result of complex shifts in the expectations from work, as well as rising levels of psychosocial strain and the pressure of digital transformation. In the analysis, the concept of work engagement was adopted, for this vantage point justifies the framing of engagement as a positive and active form of mental well-being and helps grasp the vital role of psychological presence of employees in the workplace. At the same time, it highlights a relevant correlation between engagement and the quality of employee experience, alongside the need to take this perspective into consideration in strategies for the development of work resources.

The scoping review method used enabled the identification and systematization of work resources that determine well-being and engagement, and a division of these into four groups: work qualities, leadership qualities, psychosocial processes, and processes related to digital transformation. This served as the basis for defining the key challenges for managers, which involve embracing authentic and transformational leadership. Nowadays, managers face the task of shaping an environment that at the same time ensures productivity and responds to the needs of empowerment: meaningful tasks, autonomy, potential for job crafting and development. Equally important is fostering organizational support and community-orientedness, as well as cultivating an atmosphere of psychological safety that promotes emotional regulation. An additional challenge remains the ability to operate adaptively in the regime of AI and reduce technostress so that technology can contribute to well-being. Future research should include quantitative studies verifying the strength of the influence of particular work resources, comparative sectoral and cross-cultural analyses, as well as verification of the correlation model during periods of intense digital transformation.

A systematic implementation of these solutions may lay the foundation for a work environment that fosters long-term work engagement of employees. Places of work – grounded in empowerment-based management and positive emotions – are beneficial for employee health and fulfilment, while at the same time they enhance productivity and innovation. Furthermore, work engagement also boosts personal effectiveness, which translates into organizational efficiency, cost effectiveness, and added value for the stakeholders.

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