

Understanding Work Engagement Among Private University Lecturers: The Roles of Job Demands, Job Resources, and Basic Psychological Needs

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ABSTRACT

Work engagement has become an important indicator of employee well-being and organizational effectiveness in higher education institutions. However, maintaining high levels of work engagement among private university lecturers remains a significant challenge due to increasing job demands, limited organizational resources, and psychological pressures associated with academic responsibilities. Although the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model has been widely used to explain work engagement, previous studies have primarily focused on the direct effects of job demands and job resources while paying limited attention to the underlying psychological mechanisms through which these factors influence lecturers' engagement. Drawing upon the Job Demands–Resources Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework that explains the relationships among job demands, job resources, basic psychological needs, and work engagement. Specifically, the paper argues that job resources enhance lecturers' work engagement by satisfying their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, whereas excessive job demands may undermine the fulfillment of these psychological needs, leading to lower work engagement. Basic psychological needs are therefore proposed as a mediating mechanism linking the work environment with employee engagement. The proposed framework contributes to the organizational psychology literature by integrating two complementary theoretical perspectives to better understand work engagement in the context of private higher education institutions. In addition, the model offers practical implications for university leaders and human resource practitioners in designing organizational policies that strengthen lecturers' psychological well-being and sustainable work engagement. Future empirical studies are recommended to validate the proposed conceptual model using structural equation modeling across different higher education settings.

Keywords: Work engagement; Job demands; Job resources; Basic psychological needs; Self-Determination Theory; Job Demands–Resources Theory; Private university lecturers.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to produce high-quality teaching, research, and community engagement while responding to rapid technological, organizational, and societal changes (Ainun, 2024). Within this dynamic environment, lecturers have become strategic human resources whose performance directly influences institutional competitiveness, academic excellence, and sustainable educational development. Consequently, maintaining lecturers' work engagement has become one of the primary concerns of university management because engaged lecturers demonstrate greater enthusiasm, dedication, creativity, and persistence in fulfilling their academic responsibilities.

Work engagement has attracted considerable attention in organizational psychology because it represents a positive, fulfilling, and work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Unlike burnout, work engagement reflects employees' energetic involvement in their work and contributes significantly to individual well-being, organizational effectiveness, innovation, and long-term organizational sustainability. In higher education, engaged lecturers are more likely to demonstrate high teaching quality, actively participate in research activities, establish meaningful relationships with students, and contribute to institutional development. Therefore, understanding the factors that foster lecturers' work engagement has become an important issue for both researchers and university administrators.

Despite its importance, maintaining high work engagement among lecturers has become increasingly challenging. The transformation of higher education requires lecturers to perform multiple roles simultaneously, including teaching, conducting research, publishing in reputable journals, supervising students, obtaining research grants, participating in community service, and performing administrative responsibilities. These expanding responsibilities often increase job demands and create psychological pressure that may reduce lecturers' enthusiasm and engagement if adequate organizational support is unavailable. At the same time, universities are expected to provide sufficient organizational resources that enable lecturers to manage their workload effectively while maintaining psychological well-being.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory provides one of the most comprehensive frameworks for explaining employee well-being and work engagement. According to this theory, every occupation contains specific job demands and job resources that influence employees' motivation and psychological health. Job demands refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work requiring sustained effort and therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs. Conversely, job resources facilitate goal achievement, reduce job demands, stimulate learning and development, and enhance motivation. Numerous empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that job resources positively predict work engagement, whereas excessive job demands may decrease employees' motivational states and increase the risk of psychological strain.

Although the JD-R framework has received extensive empirical support across various occupational settings, previous studies have primarily focused on the direct relationships between job demands, job resources, and work engagement. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding the psychological mechanisms through which the work environment influences employee engagement, particularly among lecturers in private higher education institutions. This limitation suggests that the motivational process proposed by the JD-R model may not be fully explained without considering employees' internal psychological experiences.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers an important perspective for addressing this limitation by emphasizing the fulfillment of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, employees experience optimal motivation, psychological well-being, and work engagement when these three basic psychological needs are satisfied. Job resources such as supervisory support, professional development opportunities, autonomy, constructive feedback, and supportive organizational climates are likely to facilitate the fulfillment of these psychological needs. In contrast, excessive job demands may hinder employees' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and social connectedness, thereby reducing intrinsic motivation and work engagement.

Integrating the JD-R Theory with Self-Determination Theory provides a more comprehensive explanation of how workplace characteristics influence lecturers' work engagement. Rather than assuming that job demands and job resources directly determine work engagement, this integrated perspective suggests that employees first evaluate whether their work environment enables the fulfillment of their basic psychological needs. When lecturers perceive that they have sufficient autonomy in performing academic tasks, feel competent in accomplishing professional responsibilities, and experience meaningful relationships with colleagues and institutional leaders, they are more likely to become psychologically engaged in their work despite facing demanding work conditions.

Another important issue concerns the unique context of private universities. Compared with public universities, private higher education institutions often operate under greater financial constraints, higher performance expectations, limited organizational resources, and stronger competition for student recruitment and institutional accreditation. These conditions may intensify lecturers' job demands while simultaneously limiting access to organizational resources that support psychological well-being. Consequently, understanding the interaction between job demands, job resources, and basic psychological needs is particularly relevant for explaining work engagement among private university lecturers.

Although previous studies have separately investigated the relationships between job demands and work engagement, job resources and work engagement, or psychological needs and employee motivation, empirical evidence integrating these constructs within a single conceptual framework remains limited, particularly in developing countries and private higher education settings. Furthermore, relatively few studies have positioned **Basic Psychological Needs** as the underlying psychological mechanism through which **Job Demands** and **Job Resources** influence **Work Engagement**. This conceptual gap indicates the need for a more integrated theoretical model capable of explaining the motivational process underlying lecturers' engagement.

Therefore, this conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework combining the Job Demands–Resources Theory and Self-Determination Theory to explain work engagement among private university lecturers. Specifically, this paper argues that **Basic Psychological Needs** serve as a mediating mechanism linking **Job Demands** and **Job Resources** with **Work Engagement**. By integrating these complementary theoretical perspectives, the proposed framework contributes to the organizational psychology literature by extending current understanding of employee engagement within higher education institutions (Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis, 2021).. In addition, the model provides practical implications for university leaders in designing organizational policies that enhance lecturers' psychological well-being, strengthen organizational support, and promote sustainable work engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Engagement

Work engagement has become one of the most important constructs in organizational psychology because it reflects employees' positive psychological connection with their work. Kahn (1990) initially conceptualized engagement as the psychological presence of employees in their work roles, emphasizing the investment of physical, cognitive, and emotional energies in job performance. Building on this perspective, Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy and resilience, dedication reflects enthusiasm and a sense of significance, whereas absorption describes being fully concentrated and immersed in work.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007, 2017) explains that work engagement is primarily driven by motivational processes in which job resources stimulate employees' willingness to invest effort in their work. Employees who perceive adequate organizational support, autonomy, and opportunities for development are more likely to demonstrate higher engagement despite experiencing demanding work conditions. Within higher education institutions, engaged lecturers tend to exhibit greater teaching effectiveness, research productivity, organizational commitment, and proactive work behavior, making work engagement an essential indicator of institutional performance and academic excellence.

Job Demands

Job demands represent the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Although job demands are not inherently detrimental, prolonged exposure to excessive demands may lead to fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and reduced motivation. The JD-R Theory further distinguishes between

challenge demands, which encourage learning and development, and hindrance demands, which impede performance and consume employees' psychological resources.

In higher education, lecturers face increasing job demands arising from multiple academic responsibilities, including teaching, research, publication, student supervision, community engagement, and administrative duties. Such responsibilities may create significant psychological pressure, particularly in private universities where performance expectations are high and organizational resources are often limited. Consequently, understanding the role of job demands is essential for explaining variations in lecturers' work engagement (Galanakis, 2022)

Job Resources

Job resources constitute the motivational component of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory. Bakker and Demerouti (2007, 2017) defined job resources as physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that facilitate goal attainment, reduce the adverse effects of job demands, and promote learning and professional development. Examples of job resources include supervisory support, job autonomy, performance feedback, opportunities for career development, organizational justice, and supportive relationships with colleagues.

Within higher education institutions, job resources enable lecturers to perform academic responsibilities more effectively while maintaining psychological well-being. According to the JD-R Theory, job resources not only directly enhance work engagement but also buffer the negative effects of excessive job demands. Furthermore, from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, supportive organizational environments facilitate the fulfillment of employees' psychological needs, thereby strengthening intrinsic motivation and sustainable work engagement.

Basic Psychological Needs

Basic Psychological Needs are the core constructs of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), consisting of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the experience of self-direction and freedom in carrying out work activities; competence reflects employees' confidence in their ability to perform effectively; and relatedness represents the need to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships within the workplace. The satisfaction of these three psychological needs promotes intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being, and optimal functioning.

The integration of Self-Determination Theory and the JD-R Theory suggests that job resources facilitate the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, whereas excessive job demands may hinder their fulfillment. Lecturers who perceive adequate autonomy, competence, and supportive social relationships are more likely to experience enthusiasm, resilience, and stronger work engagement despite increasing academic responsibilities. Therefore, this conceptual paper proposes Basic Psychological Needs as the psychological mechanism that mediates the relationships between Job Demands, Job Resources, and Work Engagement among private university lecturers.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on work engagement, several theoretical and empirical gaps remain. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that job demands and job resources are important antecedents of work engagement within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017). Most empirical studies have focused on examining the direct effects of job demands and job resources on work engagement across various occupational settings. Although these findings have substantially advanced the understanding of employee motivation, they provide limited explanation regarding the underlying psychological mechanisms through which workplace characteristics influence employees' engagement.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly recognized the importance of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in explaining employees' motivational processes. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), the satisfaction of employees' Basic Psychological Needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, plays a crucial role in fostering intrinsic motivation and positive work-related outcomes. Nevertheless, relatively few studies have integrated the JD-R Theory and Self-Determination Theory within a single conceptual framework to explain how job demands and job resources influence work engagement through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. As a result, the mediating role of Basic Psychological Needs remains insufficiently explored, particularly in higher education settings.

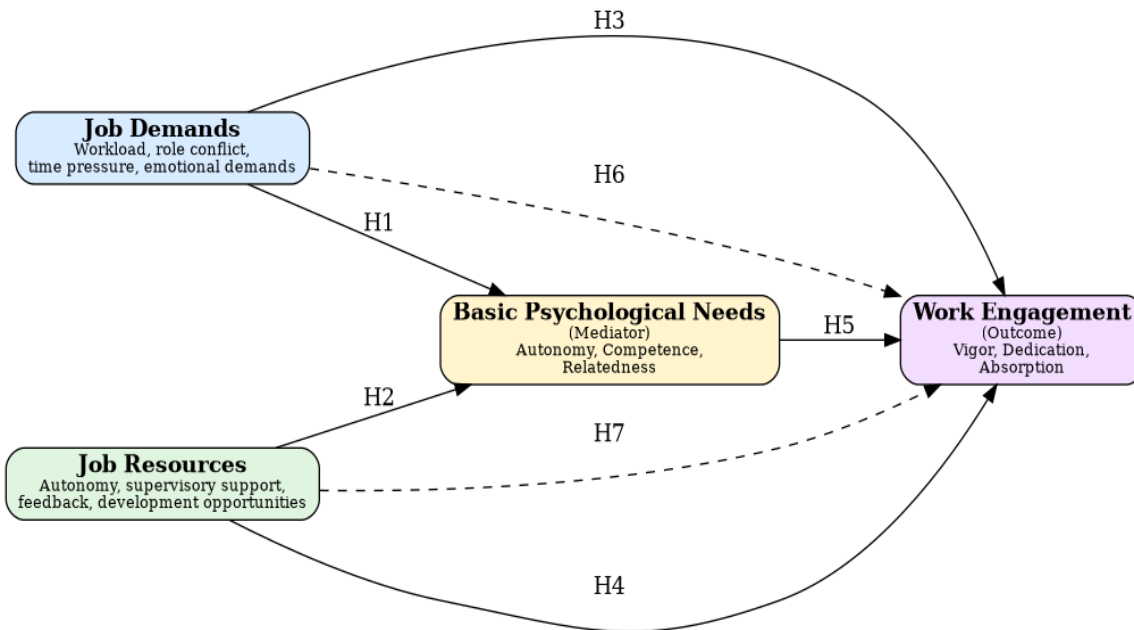
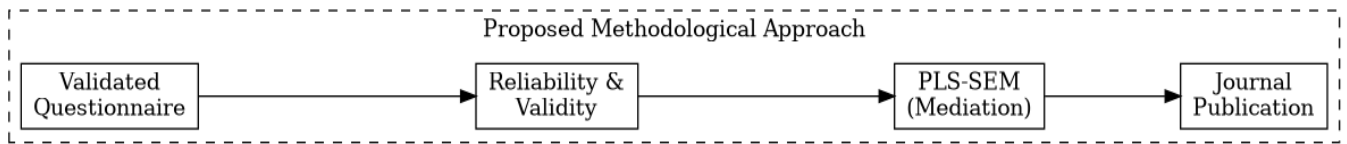
Another important research gap concerns the research context. Existing studies on work engagement have predominantly been conducted in business organizations, healthcare institutions, and public sector organizations, whereas limited attention has been devoted to private university lecturers, especially in developing countries. Academic work is characterized by unique job characteristics, including teaching responsibilities, research productivity, community service, administrative duties, and increasing institutional performance expectations. These characteristics distinguish lecturers from employees in other occupational sectors and therefore require a more context-specific theoretical explanation.

To address these gaps, this conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework combining the Job Demands–Resources Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Specifically, this study argues that Basic Psychological Needs function as the psychological mechanism linking Job Demands and Job Resources with Work Engagement among private university lecturers. By integrating these two complementary theoretical perspectives, the proposed model extends the current literature on work engagement and provides a more comprehensive understanding of lecturers' motivational processes within private higher education institutions. Furthermore, this conceptual framework offers theoretical guidance for future empirical research and practical implications for university leaders in developing organizational strategies that enhance lecturers' psychological well-being and sustainable work engagement (Kinman, G. 2014).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The proposed conceptual framework integrates the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). While the JD-R Theory explains that work engagement is influenced by the balance between job demands and job resources, SDT emphasizes that employees' intrinsic motivation depends on the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Integrating these complementary perspectives provides a more comprehensive explanation of how workplace characteristics influence lecturers' work engagement.

Within this framework, job demands are expected to reduce work engagement because excessive workload, role conflict, and psychological pressure consume employees' physical and mental resources. Conversely, job resources are expected to enhance work engagement by providing organizational support, autonomy, performance feedback, and professional development opportunities. Furthermore, this study proposes that Basic Psychological Needs serve as the underlying psychological mechanism through which job demands and job resources influence lecturers' work engagement. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework (Shuck, B., & Wollard, K. 2010).



The proposed hypotheses are formulated based on the theoretical arguments discussed in the preceding sections and are grounded in the integration of the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory** and **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**. The conceptual framework proposes that **Job Demands** and **Job Resources** influence **Work Engagement** through both direct and indirect pathways, with **Basic Psychological Needs** functioning as a mediating mechanism. This integrated perspective extends the existing literature by providing a more comprehensive explanation of how workplace characteristics shape lecturers' motivational processes and work engagement within private higher education institutions.

Table 1 Presents the Proposed Hypotheses for Future Empirical Testing.

Hypothesis	Predictor / Path	Outcome	Hypothesis Statement
H1	Job Demands	Basic Psychological Needs	Job Demands negatively influence Basic Psychological Needs.
H2	Job Resources	Basic Psychological Needs	Job Resources positively influence Basic Psychological Needs.
H3	Job Demands	Work Engagement	Job Demands negatively influence Work Engagement.
H4	Job Resources	Work Engagement	Job Resources positively influence Work Engagement.
H5	Basic Psychological Needs	Work Engagement	Basic Psychological Needs positively influence Work Engagement.
H6	Job Demands → Basic Psychological Needs	Work Engagement	Basic Psychological Needs mediate the relationship between Job Demands and Work Engagement.
H7	Job Resources → Basic Psychological Needs	Work Engagement	Basic Psychological Needs mediate the relationship between Job Resources and Work Engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper proposes an empirical research framework to examine the relationships among **Job Demands, Job Resources, Basic Psychological Needs, and Work Engagement** among private university lecturers. The proposed model integrates the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory** and **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** to explain the motivational processes underlying lecturers' work engagement. Future empirical research is expected to validate the proposed conceptual framework by testing both the direct and indirect relationships among the study variables using a quantitative research design.

The target population of the proposed empirical study comprises **private university lecturers in Medan, Indonesia**. Data are proposed to be collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire using validated measurement instruments adapted from established literature. Specifically, **Work Engagement** will be measured using the **Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)** developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). **Job Demands** and **Job Resources** will be assessed using measurement scales derived from the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model** developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007, 2017). **Basic Psychological Needs** will be measured using the **Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction at Work Scale** based on **Self-Determination Theory** (Deci & Ryan, 2000), covering the dimensions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. All measurement items are proposed to be rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from **1 (strongly disagree)** to **5 (strongly agree)**.

The proposed research model will be analyzed using **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** because this analytical approach is appropriate for examining complex structural relationships involving multiple latent constructs and mediation effects. Prior to testing the structural model, the measurement model will be evaluated by examining **indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity**. Subsequently, the structural model will be assessed by evaluating **path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping procedures** to test the significance of the proposed hypotheses. Furthermore, mediation analysis will be conducted to examine the indirect effects of **Basic Psychological Needs** on the relationships between **Job Demands, Job Resources, and Work Engagement**.

The proposed methodological approach provides a comprehensive procedure for validating the conceptual framework and contributes to the growing literature on employee motivation and work engagement within higher education institutions. By integrating organizational and psychological perspectives, future empirical findings are expected to provide valuable theoretical contributions and practical implications for university leaders in designing organizational policies that enhance lecturers' psychological well-being and sustainable work engagement.

Expected Relationships

Based on the integration of the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory** and **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**, this conceptual paper proposes that **Job Demands, Job Resources, and Basic Psychological Needs** jointly explain lecturers' **Work Engagement**. Specifically, **Job Demands** are expected to negatively influence **Basic Psychological Needs** and **Work Engagement**, whereas **Job Resources** are expected to positively influence both **Basic Psychological Needs** and **Work Engagement**. Furthermore, **Basic Psychological Needs** are proposed to positively influence **Work Engagement** by enhancing lecturers' intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being.

In addition to these direct relationships, this study proposes that **Basic Psychological Needs** mediate the relationships between **Job Demands, Job Resources, and Work Engagement**. The proposed framework suggests that supportive work environments enhance lecturers' work engagement by satisfying their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, whereas excessive job demands may reduce engagement by frustrating these psychological needs. Future empirical research is expected to validate these proposed relationships using

PLS-SEM, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of work engagement among private university lecturers.

Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual paper contributes to the literature by integrating the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory** and **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** into a comprehensive framework for explaining **Work Engagement** among private university lecturers. While previous studies have primarily examined the direct effects of **Job Demands** and **Job Resources** on work engagement, this paper extends existing knowledge by proposing **Basic Psychological Needs** as the psychological mechanism that explains how workplace characteristics influence lecturers' motivational processes.

Furthermore, this study enriches the work engagement literature by introducing an integrated theoretical perspective that combines organizational and psychological factors within the context of higher education. By positioning **Basic Psychological Needs** as a mediating construct, the proposed framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between workplace conditions and intrinsic motivation. This integration contributes to the growing body of organizational psychology literature and offers a stronger theoretical foundation for future empirical studies on employee engagement (Van den Broeck, et al 2016).

Finally, this conceptual framework expands the application of the **JD-R Theory** and **SDT** within private higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries. The proposed model provides a theoretical basis for future empirical research examining the relationships among **Job Demands**, **Job Resources**, **Basic Psychological Needs**, and **Work Engagement**, thereby contributing to the advancement of employee motivation and work engagement research in the higher education sector.

Future Research Directions

Future research should empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework using diverse samples of academic staff across different higher education institutions and cultural contexts. Examining lecturers from public and private universities, as well as conducting cross-country comparisons, would enhance the generalizability of the proposed relationships among **Job Demands**, **Job Resources**, **Basic Psychological Needs**, and **Work Engagement**. In addition, longitudinal research designs are recommended to better capture the dynamic nature of work engagement and psychological need satisfaction over time.

Future studies may also extend the proposed model by incorporating additional organizational and psychological variables, such as **Perceived Organizational Support**, **Leadership**, **Psychological Capital**, **Organizational Commitment**, **Job Satisfaction**, or **Psychological Well-Being**. Furthermore, applying alternative analytical approaches, including **multi-group analysis**, **moderation analysis**, and **longitudinal Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**, would provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which workplace characteristics influence lecturers' work engagement.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework for explaining **Work Engagement** among private university lecturers by combining the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory** and **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**. The proposed model suggests that **Job Demands** and **Job Resources** influence **Work Engagement** both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of **Basic Psychological Needs**. By incorporating the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness into the JD-R framework, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of the motivational processes underlying lecturers' work engagement.

The proposed framework contributes to the organizational psychology literature by extending existing work engagement research and highlighting the importance of integrating organizational and psychological

perspectives. In addition, it offers a theoretical foundation for future empirical studies and provides practical insights for higher education institutions seeking to enhance lecturers' motivation, psychological well-being, and sustainable work engagement. Future empirical validation of the proposed model will further strengthen its theoretical and practical contributions to employee engagement research in higher education.

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