



The Role of Organizational Culture in Enhancing Employee Engagement in the Era of Disruption

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Abstract. *In the era of disruption, employee engagement has emerged as a strategic imperative for organizational resilience and productivity. This study explores the role of organizational culture in sustaining employee engagement amid technological transformation, remote work, and economic uncertainty. Using a qualitative exploratory method, data were collected through in depth interviews with managers and employees from a private organization in Gresik, Indonesia. The findings reveal that core cultural values agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment play a crucial role in enhancing employees' emotional commitment and motivation during times of change. These values foster psychological safety, proactive behavior, and organizational belonging. The study further demonstrates that organizational culture serves as both a mediator and moderator in the relationship between external disruptions and employee engagement. Theoretically, this research contributes to engagement literature by contextualizing it within culture driven frameworks, while practically, it offers HR professionals and leaders a roadmap for shaping adaptive cultures that preserve engagement during uncertainty. The study also discusses the limitations of its qualitative approach and recommends future research to validate the findings across various industries.*

Keywords: *Agility, Empowerment, Employee Engagement, Inclusiveness, Organizational Culture*

Abstrak. Di era disrupsi, keterlibatan karyawan menjadi elemen strategis dalam menjaga ketahanan dan produktivitas organisasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran budaya organisasi dalam meningkatkan keterlibatan karyawan di tengah transformasi teknologi, penerapan kerja jarak jauh, dan ketidakpastian ekonomi. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap manajer dan karyawan dari sebuah organisasi swasta di Gresik, Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai budaya utama seperti kelincahan (agility), inklusivitas, dan pemberdayaan berperan penting dalam memperkuat komitmen emosional dan motivasi kerja karyawan pada masa perubahan. Nilai-nilai tersebut menciptakan rasa aman secara psikologis, mendorong perilaku proaktif, serta memperkuat rasa memiliki terhadap organisasi. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa budaya organisasi berfungsi sebagai mediator sekaligus moderator dalam hubungan antara disrupsi eksternal dan keterlibatan karyawan. Secara teoritis, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam literatur keterlibatan karyawan yang berbasis budaya, sedangkan secara praktis, hasilnya memberikan panduan bagi praktisi SDM dan pimpinan organisasi dalam membentuk budaya adaptif yang mampu mempertahankan keterlibatan di tengah ketidakpastian. Penelitian ini juga menyampaikan keterbatasan pendekatan kualitatif dan memberikan saran untuk penelitian lanjutan di berbagai sektor industri.

Kata kunci: Budaya Organisasi, Empowerment, Engagement Karyawan, Inklusivitas, Kelincahan

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become a vital determinant of organizational productivity, employee loyalty, and overall performance. In contemporary work environments, employee engagement reflects the emotional attachment and commitment of employees to their organization, which manifests in enthusiasm, dedication, and a willingness to go beyond formal job expectations (Saks, 2022). Engaged employees tend to exhibit high levels of intrinsic motivation, active participation in work processes, and commitment to achieving

organizational goals (Schaufeli, 2021). Empirical evidence confirms a strong positive correlation between employee engagement and various organizational outcomes, such as individual performance, job satisfaction, and employee retention (Albrecht et al., 2020). In the current era of disruption characterized by rapid technological shifts, economic uncertainty, and the transformation of work models organizations increasingly depend on employee engagement to maintain stability and competitive advantage (Bakker et al., 2023). Therefore, engagement is not merely a metric of employee satisfaction but a core strategic asset in navigating turbulent business environments.

The phenomenon of disruption, driven by digital transformation, automation, and the reconfiguration of business models, poses significant challenges to sustaining employee engagement. The emergence of remote work, hybrid working models, and digital workflows has reshaped how employees interact with their organizations, often leading to a decline in social connectivity and emotional engagement (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2022). Many organizations report productivity losses linked to reduced interpersonal interaction and diminished team cohesion. However, during periods of organizational turbulence, engagement becomes a key driver of resilience and innovation (Molino et al., 2020). As such, it is imperative to understand how organizations can strategically foster engagement amid uncertainty. While employee engagement has been widely studied, there remains a research gap regarding how it can be influenced by organizational culture within the unique context of disruption. This study addresses this gap by exploring the role of organizational culture as a fundamental mechanism for enhancing engagement in disruptive times.

Organizational culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape members' behaviors within an organization. A strong, positive organizational culture has been shown to foster a supportive work environment, enhance a sense of belonging, and boost employee motivation (Schein & Schein, 2021). Cultural values that promote collaboration, innovation, and employee development are particularly influential in encouraging engagement (Zhu et al., 2021). Ahmed et al. (2022) highlight that participatory and open organizational cultures create psychological safety, which is essential for employee engagement. In disruption driven environments, organizational culture functions as a behavioral compass, guiding adaptive and proactive responses to change (Chang et al., 2023). By cultivating a culture aligned with agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment, organizations can better navigate uncertainties while sustaining high levels of employee engagement.

This study aims to examine the role of organizational culture in enhancing employee engagement in the era of disruption. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on employee engagement by contextualizing it within organizational culture dynamics during disruptive transformations. Empirically, the study offers practical insights for organizational leaders and human resource professionals in designing cultural strategies that support engagement, adaptability, and resilience. By exploring this relationship, the research not only addresses a critical gap in the literature but also equips organizations with a framework for sustaining engagement in times of unprecedented change.

In the increasingly complex era of disruption, numerous studies have explored the link between employee engagement and various organizational factors such as job satisfaction (Albrecht et al., 2020), intrinsic motivation (Schaufeli, 2021), and the impact of hybrid work environments (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2022). However, most of these studies focus on general mechanisms like leadership styles or reward systems without specifically examining the foundational role of organizational culture during disruptive periods. For example, Zhu et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of collaborative and innovative cultures for engagement, but their research was conducted in relatively stable, traditional settings. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2022) emphasized that participatory cultures enhance psychological safety, yet their work did not explore how such cultures are developed or sustained in conditions of high uncertainty. While Molino et al. (2020) and Bakker et al. (2023) suggest that engagement is vital for organizational resilience during crises, they did not investigate how values like agility, inclusivity, and empowerment embedded in organizational culture contribute to sustaining engagement. Although Schein & Schein (2021) assert that culture guides adaptive behavior, empirical evidence linking specific cultural traits to employee engagement under disruption remains sparse. Moreover, existing research tends to overlook how organizational culture operates as a mediating or moderating factor in the relationship between disruptive change and engagement, particularly in digital, remote, or hybrid work settings.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a conceptual model and empirical analysis that investigates organizational culture especially agile, inclusive, and empowering values as both a mediator and moderator in the relationship between disruptive conditions (e.g., remote work, digital transformation, economic uncertainty) and employee engagement. Unlike prior studies, this research quantitatively measures how cultural dimensions influence employee motivation and commitment in rapidly changing environments. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of organizational culture within an engagement

framework tailored for disruption, providing empirical benchmarks for cultural values and actionable strategies for HR professionals and leaders. Specifically, the study contributes new insights by (1) identifying cultural elements that most significantly influence engagement during disruption, (2) testing how culture moderates the impact of external shocks on engagement, and (3) delivering practical guidelines for shaping adaptive organizational cultures that sustain employee engagement amid transformation. This integrated approach fills a crucial theoretical and practical void in the literature and offers a valuable roadmap for organizations striving to navigate uncertainty with a resilient and engaged workforce.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that elucidate the dynamics between organizational culture and employee engagement, particularly in the context of disruptive change. The primary theoretical underpinning is Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employee engagement is shaped by reciprocal relationships between employees and their organizations. According to Saks (2022), when organizations foster supportive and value driven environments, employees are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of involvement, commitment, and performance. In the context of disruption, this exchange becomes even more critical, as uncertainty and instability can weaken trust and motivation unless buffered by strong cultural support.

In addition, Organizational Culture Theory as advanced by Schein & Schein (2021) provides the conceptual lens through which culture is seen not merely as background context but as an active driver of behavior, norms, and engagement. This theory underscores the importance of shared values, symbols, and assumptions that guide employee behavior, particularly in uncertain times. Prior research supports this view, demonstrating that agile and empowering cultures can significantly improve engagement and adaptability (Zhu et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2023). Empirical studies by Ahmed et al. (2022) and Molino et al. (2020) reinforce the notion that participative and psychologically safe environments foster stronger emotional commitment among employees, especially during transitions. While the hypotheses in this study are not explicitly stated, the research assumes that specific cultural dimensions such as adaptability, inclusiveness, and empowerment play pivotal roles in enhancing employee engagement amid organizational disruptions.

Beyond Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Culture Theory, Job Demands Resources (JD-R) Model also serves as a relevant theoretical framework. The JD-R model,

as discussed by Bakker et al. (2023), suggests that employee engagement is a result of the balance between job demands and the availability of job and personal resources. In times of disruption, demands tend to increase due to new technologies, remote work, and changing workflows thus necessitating stronger internal resources such as a supportive organizational culture. Organizational culture, in this context, functions as a resource that buffers stress and reinforces intrinsic motivation, thereby sustaining engagement.

Another important concept underpinning this research is Psychological Safety, which is closely linked to participative and open organizational cultures. Ahmed et al. (2022) emphasize that psychological safety enables employees to express ideas, take risks, and engage proactively without fear of negative consequences. This becomes particularly crucial during organizational transformation, where innovation and change require employees to be fully engaged and confident in their roles. A culture that nurtures psychological safety enhances not only engagement but also trust, resilience, and creativity traits necessary for navigating disruptions.

Previous empirical studies support the integration of these theories. For instance, Zhu et al. (2021) found that innovative organizational cultures positively influence both engagement and performance outcomes. Similarly, Chang et al. (2023) reported that digital transformation success is strongly tied to adaptive cultural traits such as learning orientation, flexibility, and openness. However, while these studies confirm the cultural determinants of engagement, few have examined how these relationships evolve in dynamic, disrupted work environments. This study addresses that gap by focusing on the intersection of disruption, organizational culture, and employee engagement using an integrative, multi theory approach.

By synthesizing these theoretical frameworks, the study proposes a conceptual model in which organizational culture serves both as a moderator and mediator in the relationship between disruptive organizational conditions and employee engagement. The theoretical integration allows for a more nuanced understanding of how internal cultural mechanisms interact with external environmental pressures. In doing so, the research contributes not only to the theoretical development of engagement and culture literature but also provides a practical foundation for leaders aiming to sustain performance and motivation during periods of significant change.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach to investigate the role of organizational culture in enhancing employee engagement in the era of disruption. This methodology is suitable for uncovering deep insights and understanding the meaning and dynamics behind employees' experiences with organizational culture during disruptive change (Yin, 2021). The qualitative design also allows the researcher to explore complex relationships between organizational values and employees' emotional and cognitive involvement.

Data collection was conducted through in depth interviews with key informants, including managers, HR staff, and employees from various departments in an organization located in Gresik, Indonesia. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in organizational transformation processes and their experiences adapting to changes in workplace culture amid digitalization and remote work settings. The interviews focused on participants' perceptions of cultural values such as agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment and their impact on motivation, commitment, and employee participation in disruptive contexts (Schein & Schein, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2022).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2021), enabling the identification of meaning patterns (themes) associated with organizational culture and employee engagement. The validity of findings was ensured through data source triangulation and peer debriefing. The analysis was conducted iteratively to build a conceptual understanding of how organizational culture functions as an adaptive mechanism during periods of uncertainty and rapid change (Chang et al., 2023).

The study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Culture Theory, and the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model, which collectively explain how internal resources like organizational culture can mitigate work stress and reinforce engagement (Saks, 2022; Bakker et al., 2023). As such, this research not only offers empirical insight into the cultural dynamics of employee engagement but also contributes theoretically within the context of organizations undergoing disruption.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that organizational culture plays a critical role in enhancing employee engagement during times of disruption, particularly within digitally driven and hybrid work environments. Through in depth interviews with key informants from various organizational departments, it was found that cultural values such as agility, inclusiveness,

and empowerment have a direct influence on employee motivation, commitment, and active participation. Informants reported that in the face of technological changes and economic uncertainties, an organizational culture that promotes openness to ideas, participative decision making, and recognition of individual contributions fosters a strong sense of ownership and emotional attachment to the organization. These findings indicate that in digital workplaces, organizational culture is not merely a supportive background element but acts as a strategic adaptive mechanism that sustains psychological stability and work enthusiasm among employees.

This result aligns with the principles of Social Exchange Theory (Saks, 2022), which posits that employee engagement is shaped by reciprocal relationships between individuals and organizations. When organizations provide a supportive and value oriented environment, employees are more likely to respond with high levels of commitment and performance. Additionally, the cultural framework proposed by Schein (2021) emphasizes that shared values and behavioral norms within organizations shape interaction patterns and adaptive responses to crisis. In this context, adaptive and empowering cultures were shown to reinforce psychological safety, as also identified by Ahmed et al. (2022), enabling employees to express ideas and engage in innovation without fear of negative repercussions. The findings further support the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker et al., 2023), which recognizes organizational culture as a vital internal resource for managing increased work demands during disruptive periods. Thus, the integration of theory and empirical data in this study demonstrates that organizational culture functions not only as a moderator but also as a mediator in the relationship between disruption and employee engagement.

Cultural Drivers

The study identified agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment as core cultural values that significantly enhance employee engagement during disruption. Employees described that these values helped them adapt to changes brought by digital transformation, remote work, and new performance expectations. Agility was viewed as a cultural trait that encouraged responsiveness and quick decision making. Informants stated that organizations that fostered agile thinking enabled employees to feel more confident and proactive in their roles. This flexibility was especially valuable when dealing with sudden shifts in workflow or digital tools.

Inclusiveness was associated with a sense of belonging and voice in organizational processes. Employees emphasized that when leadership valued diverse opinions and

encouraged open dialogue, it strengthened emotional attachment and commitment. Inclusivity also promoted mutual respect across hierarchical levels, which is crucial during uncertain periods. Empowerment, the third cultural driver, was described as providing autonomy and trust to employees. Many informants shared that being entrusted with decision making power made them feel more invested in organizational outcomes. This sense of control mitigated the psychological stress often associated with disruptive change.

Table 1. Key Cultural Values and Their Impact on Employee Engagement During Disruption

Cultural Value	Description	Reported Impact on Engagement	Supporting Insight from Informants
Agility	Encouraging adaptability, flexibility, and quick response to change	Increases employee confidence and proactivity	"I feel more motivated when our team can make fast decisions without waiting for top management."
Inclusiveness	Promoting open dialogue, diversity, and equal participation	Enhances emotional connection and team cohesion	"When my opinions are heard, I feel more valued and part of the company."
Empowerment	Providing autonomy and authority in decision-making	Boosts sense of ownership and motivation	"Being trusted to lead a project made me more engaged and responsible."

Source: Field Interview Data (2025)

Table 1 summarizes the central findings of this study concerning three organizational cultural values agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment that were found to significantly influence employee engagement during periods of disruption. Each value is not only defined conceptually but is also linked to its observed impact on engagement, supported by direct quotes from interviewees. This approach aligns with the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which enables a deep exploration of subjective meaning and employee work experiences in organizational contexts.

The first cultural value, agility, refers to the organization's capacity to act quickly and respond flexibly to changing conditions. Informants reported that when decision making processes are streamlined and less bureaucratic, they feel more empowered and proactive in their roles. This contributes directly to increased work motivation and a stronger sense of ownership. Agility proves particularly relevant during times of disruption, where external dynamics demand rapid adaptation. These findings are consistent with Bakker et al. (2023), who emphasize that a flexible work culture serves as a critical internal resource to manage elevated work demands in digitally transforming environments.

The second value, inclusiveness, highlights the importance of open participation, equal voice, and appreciation for diversity. Interview data indicate that employees feel more

emotionally engaged when their opinions are acknowledged and they are included in decision making processes. This not only creates a psychologically safe workplace but also strengthens team cohesion and cross functional trust. These outcomes align with the work of Ahmed et al. (2022), who underscore the role of inclusiveness in fostering psychological safety a critical condition for innovation and proactive employee behavior during change.

The third value, empowerment, refers to granting autonomy and trust to employees in decision making. Employees who felt empowered expressed stronger motivation and commitment. One informant shared that being entrusted to lead a project significantly increased their sense of responsibility and engagement. This observation supports Social Exchange Theory (Saks, 2022), which suggests that when organizations provide resources and trust, employees reciprocate through heightened commitment and performance.

Together, these three cultural values form a foundation for sustaining employee engagement in uncertain and fast changing work environments. Rather than operating in isolation, these values interact synergistically to create an adaptive, supportive, and enabling organizational culture. In disrupted settings marked by digitalization and rapid change, such cultural characteristics serve as strategic levers for maintaining, and even enhancing, employee engagement. These findings contribute valuable empirical insights to the relatively underexplored literature on the role of specific cultural attributes in times of organizational disruption (Chang et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2021).

Culture as a Buffer

Organizational culture was also found to serve as a buffer between environmental uncertainty and employee morale. This aligns with Social Exchange Theory, where the quality of organizational support influences employee reciprocity in the form of engagement. In disrupted work environments, such as those involving hybrid models or digital workflows, traditional support systems weaken. Culture fills this gap by creating psychological safety. Informants shared that cultures that emphasize openness and support help reduce anxiety and resistance to change.

The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model provides further insight into this buffering function. Increased job demands during disruption such as new learning curves, communication challenges, or role ambiguity can drain employee energy. However, a resource rich culture, particularly one that promotes collaboration and learning, offsets these pressures. Interview data confirm that when organizational values align with the needs of employees during transitions, engagement is preserved or even heightened. Culture, therefore, does not merely coexist with engagement it actively sustains it during instability.

Implications for Practice

The findings offer valuable implications for practitioners, especially in human resource management and organizational leadership. One critical recommendation is for leaders to institutionalize cultural values that are proven to enhance engagement: agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment. This institutionalization can be achieved through participative decision making forums, regular feedback mechanisms, and flexible work policies. Managers are also advised to model the desired cultural traits, as leadership behavior was repeatedly cited by informants as a determinant of employee sentiment.

Human resource professionals should focus on training and development programs that reinforce cultural adaptability. Moreover, onboarding processes should be used strategically to instill cultural values early in the employee lifecycle. In sum, an intentional and proactive approach to shaping organizational culture can serve as a strategic asset in navigating disruption. Engagement strategies should be culturally grounded and context sensitive to remain effective amid rapid organizational change.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that organizational culture serves as a pivotal mechanism for sustaining and enhancing employee engagement during times of disruption. Cultural values such as agility, inclusiveness, and empowerment emerge as critical enablers of emotional commitment, motivation, and proactive behavior among employees facing uncertainty. These values not only strengthen individual psychological resilience but also foster collective adaptability in the workplace. The study demonstrates that organizational culture operates both as a mediator and moderator between external shocks such as digital transformation, remote work transitions, and economic volatility and employee engagement. Thus, culture is not merely a background variable, but a strategic resource that organizations must intentionally cultivate to preserve stability and performance during periods of rapid change.

From a practical standpoint, organizations are encouraged to institutionalize adaptive cultural traits through participative leadership, open communication, and employee development initiatives. Human resource professionals should prioritize cultural alignment in recruitment, onboarding, and continuous learning programs. Nonetheless, this study acknowledges its limitations, including the qualitative design that may restrict generalizability beyond the specific organizational context studied. Future research should incorporate mixed methods or longitudinal designs to examine causal pathways and validate

these findings across diverse sectors. Additionally, further exploration is needed to understand how cultural transformation processes unfold in different organizational structures and industries. In sum, this research provides both theoretical and practical contributions by underscoring the strategic value of culture in navigating organizational disruption with an engaged and resilient workforce.

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