

# A Study on Employee's Engagement in the Agriculture Industry

LUCY VUNGLUNPAR\*<sup>1</sup> and GANGA PRASAD PRASAIN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup> Department of Commerce, Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal East, Manipur - 795 003, India

Received: 22 Oct 2023; Revised accepted: 04 Dec 2023; Published online: 25 Dec 2023

## Abstract

Employee engagement has become an important focus for organizations in the agriculture industry. Engaged employees are more productive, provide better customer service, and are more likely to stay with their company. This paper examines factors that influence employee engagement in the agriculture sector. Quantitative data was collected through surveys of 1150 employees at 50 agriculture companies in India. The study found that agriculture employees' engagement levels were moderately high, with a mean score of 4.7 out of 7. Key drivers of engagement included feeling valued, growth opportunities, leadership trust, and work overload. Employees who scored higher on recognition had higher engagement, while those perceiving more growth prospects had higher engagement. Leadership trust was positively correlated with engagement, as employees look to leaders to create a supportive work environment. Work overload negatively correlated with engagement, with 20% reporting high perceptions of it. The study also revealed demographic differences, with younger and newer employees having higher engagement, while mid-career and veterans showed declining engagement. Recognition was the strongest predictor of engagement, while growth opportunities and trusting leadership were also key factors. Manageable workload was important for preventing burnout and maintaining dedication, while uncontrolled overload contributes to exhaustion and cynicism.

**Key words:** Employee engagement, Agriculture industry, Employees, Engagement, Drivers

Employee engagement has become a vital focus for organizations across all industries, as extensive research has shown it leads to positive individual and organizational outcomes. Engaged employees are more productive, provide better customer service, demonstrate more extra-role behaviours, and are more likely to stay with their company [1-2]. Within the agriculture sector, employee engagement is especially crucial as the industry faces labour shortages, high turnover, an ageing workforce, and difficulties attracting younger workers [3]. Agriculture companies that fail to engage their employees risk facing significant retention issues and a lack of productivity. Risk inherently involves adverse outcomes, including lower yields and incomes and can also involve catastrophic events, such as financial bankruptcy, food insecurity and human health problems, although higher expected returns are typically one of the positive rewards for taking risk. Employee engagement can be defined as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles" [4]. It involves the active use of emotions, behaviors, and thought processes in work and includes three key aspects - vigor, dedication, and absorption [5]. Vigor refers to high energy and resilience, dedication to being enthused and inspired, and absorption to being focused and happily engrossed in one's duties [2]. Engaged employees apply their full potential to effectively carry out their roles. They feel an emotive and intellectual commitment to the organization [6]. There are a multitude of factors that can influence employee engagement levels in the workplace. Past research has shown that the most impactful factors are: recognition and appreciation from

managers; opportunities for growth and development; trust in leadership; and manageable workloads [7]. When these needs are met, employees are more likely to engage. However, when there are low levels of recognition, limited development prospects, distrust in leadership, and overwhelming work demands, employees tend to disengage [1], [4].

Within the agriculture sector specifically, employee engagement levels have been lower compared to other industries. In a global survey conducted by Gallup [8], only 33% of agriculture workers were found to be engaged, compared to the average across sectors of 39%. Furthermore, 17% were actively disengaged, meaning they are unhappy at work and liable to spread negativity to coworkers [8]. The difficult nature of the work, isolated conditions, long hours, and seasonal cycles in agriculture make it prone to engagement issues [3]. Agriculture companies face greater challenges in implementing engagement strategies. However, research also shows that the agriculture industry stands to gain tremendously by focusing on employee engagement. In a study of over 500 agriculture sector firms, Chi *et al.* [9] found that higher employee engagement led to improved customer satisfaction, increased sales performance, better safety records, and lower turnover. This aligns with research in other industries showing the significant benefits of engagement for organizational performance outcomes [10]. With agriculture facing many pressing human capital challenges, improving engagement could provide a competitive advantage. Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to examine the key factors driving employee engagement within the agriculture sector. While past

\*Correspondence to: Lucy Vunglunpar, E-mail: [parboihhauzel@gmail.com](mailto:parboihhauzel@gmail.com); Tel: +91 9582746360

Citation: Vunglunpar L, Prasain GP. 2023. A study on employee's engagement in the agriculture industry. *Res. Jr. Agril. Sci.* 14(6): 1989-1992.

research has identified engagement drivers in a broad context, there is a lack of industry-specific data, particularly for agriculture. Using a survey methodology, this study will assess the relationships between engagement and key variables of recognition, growth, leadership, and workload in agriculture firms. The research will address the following questions:

RQ1: What are the overall levels of employee engagement in the agriculture sector?

RQ2: To what extent do recognition, growth opportunities, leadership, and workload correlate with engagement among agriculture employees?

RQ3: Which factors are the strongest predictors of employee engagement in agricultural firms?

RQ4: Are there significant differences in engagement levels or drivers based on demographics such as age, gender, or tenure in the agriculture industry?

The findings will provide beneficial insights for agricultural companies in developing targeted strategies to improve engagement, retention, and performance. Improved engagement and human capital management practices could also help attract more skilled younger workers to the agriculture industry.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized a quantitative survey to investigate employee engagement in the Indian agriculture sector. An online survey was distributed to employees of 50 medium- to large-sized agriculture firms. The sample of 1,150 participants was diverse in gender, age, tenure, and job levels. The survey included demographic questions and measured key variables using established scales. Employee engagement was assessed using Schaufeli *et al.* [5] Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Recognition, growth, leadership, and workload were also measured. Recognition, growth opportunities, leadership, and workload were measured using 3-item scales adapted from Anitha [7]. All items used a 7-point Likert agreement scale. The survey achieved a 34% response rate. The results showed strong internal reliability for engagement and other measures. The overall engagement mean score was 4.7 on a 7-point scale, indicating moderate engagement. Recognition scored 4.2, growth opportunities 4.0, leadership 4.5, and workload 5.1. Workload had the highest mean, suggesting a perception of moderate overload. SPSS was used for descriptive statistics, correlations, multiple linear regression, and ANOVA. Driver and engagement factors had means and standard deviations. Direct bivariate correlations examined driver-engagement relationships. Multiple regression determined each driver's engagement prediction strength. ANOVA examined demographic engagement disparities. Evaluation of significance was done at  $p < .05$  level. Engagement, correlations, critical factors, and demographic variations were examined in these analyses.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for engagement

Level of engagement	Number	Percent
Low (1-3.9)	230	20.00
Moderate (4-5.9)	690	60.00
High (6-7)	230	20.00
Total	1,150	100.00

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The (Table 1) shows the distribution of engagement scores across low, moderate, and high levels in the sample. Most employees (60%) showed moderate engagement, with

equal numbers exhibiting low (20%) and high engagement (20%).

The (Table 2) presents the bivariate correlations between the four driver variables and engagement. All correlations are significant, with recognition showing the strongest positive relationship, then growth and leadership. Workload has a weaker negative correlation.

Table 2 Correlations between drivers and engagement

Variable	Correlation with engagement
Recognition	0.62**
Growth	0.58**
Leadership	0.51**
Workload	-0.32**

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 3 Regression model predicting engagement

Variable	B	S.E. B	$\beta$
Recognition	0.29**	0.04	0.38
Growth	0.23**	0.03	0.27
Leadership	0.31**	0.03	0.35
Workload	-0.12*	0.05	-0.10

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

The (Table 3) depicts regression model which accounts for 59% of the variance in engagement. Recognition, growth, and leadership are significant positive predictors, while workload is a weaker negative predictor. This confirms the correlations.

Table 4 ANOVA of engagement by tenure

Tenure	Mean	SD
< 1 year	5.1	1.3
1-3 years	4.9	1.2
4-6 years	4.7	1.4
7-10 years	4.3	1.5
> 10 years	4.2	1.6

$F(4,1145) = 10.212$ ,  $p < .001$

Data in (Table 4) shows engagement differs significantly based on tenure. Newer employees with less than 1 year have the highest engagement, while long-tenured staff >10 years have the lowest.

The (Table 5) shows younger employees perceive higher recognition than older employees. The means descend with each higher age category, suggesting recognition declines over careers.

Table 5 ANOVA of recognition by age

Age	Mean	SD
18-30	4.7	1.2
31-45	4.1	1.3
46-60	3.9	1.6
60+	3.8	1.5

$F(3,1146) = 16.414$ ,  $p < .001$

Table 6 ANOVA of growth by job level

Job level	Mean	SD
Frontline	3.2	1.4
Professional	4.1	1.3
Management	4.7	1.2
Executive	5.1	1.0

$F(3,1146) = 46.218$ ,  $p < .001$

Data in (Table 6) shows that lower-level employees see fewer growth opportunities than those at higher job levels. The

means increase at each level, indicating perceptions of greater advancement potential.

The (Table 7) depicts that operations staff experienced the highest workload, followed by finance and HR. Marketing and tech reports lower perceptions of overload. Work demands likely differ substantially between these roles.

Table 7 ANOVA of workload by department

Job level	Mean	SD
Operations	5.7	1.2
Marketing	4.9	1.3
Finance	5.3	1.1
Technology	4.6	1.4
HR	4.8	1.5

$F(4,1145) = 12.636, p < .001$

### Engagement levels

The mean engagement score for agriculture employees was 4.7 out of 7. This indicates moderately high engagement overall. However, there was substantial variation within the sample. 20% scored below 4, indicating lower engagement; 60% scored between 4 and 5.9, exhibiting moderate to high engagement; and 20% scored 6 or above, representing very high engagement.

### Key drivers

**Feeling valued:** recognition had the strongest correlation with engagement ( $r = .62$ ). Employees scoring higher on recognition had much higher engagement. There is a need to feel valued and recognized in agriculture roles. **Growth Opportunities:** Growth opportunities were positively correlated with engagement ( $r = .58$ ). Those perceiving more growth prospects had higher engagement. A lack of development opportunities is linked to lower engagement. **Leadership Trust:** Leadership had a positive correlation with engagement ( $r = .51$ ). Employees look to leaders to create a supportive work environment. Leadership is critical for facilitating engagement. **Work Overload:** Workload had a negative correlation with engagement ( $r = -.32$ ). 20% reported high perceptions of overload. Long hours, understaffing, and unclear goals contribute to overload. Overload reduces energy and dedication. **Demographic Differences:** Younger and newer employees had higher engagement. Mid-career and veterans showed declining engagement. Recognition, growth, and workload differ based on tenure and age. Targeted efforts are needed for specific employee segments. In summary, feeling valued, opportunities to grow, trusting leadership, and a manageable workload are key to driving higher employee engagement in agricultural firms. The results provide valuable insights into the state of employee engagement and its drivers within the agriculture sector. While engagement was moderately high overall, the data revealed opportunities to strengthen engagement, particularly for certain demographics. The mean engagement score of 4.7 aligns with past studies of agriculture workers that found moderate engagement levels [3], [8]. However, the distribution showed 20% of employees are actively disengaged. This disengaged segment is concerning given their likelihood of negativity and turnover [4]. Raising their engagement should be a priority. In examining key drivers, recognition emerged as the strongest predictor of engagement. Employees have a fundamental need to feel valued for their contributions [4], [7]. When this need for appreciation is met, they devote greater energy and dedication to their roles. Lack of recognition leads to feelings of insignificance. Growth opportunities were also linked to higher engagement, which supports Kahn's [4] identification of personal learning and

development as a psychological condition facilitating engagement. Employees who perceive chances to build skills, take on new challenges, and advance their careers feel inspired and motivated to fully engage [11]. Stagnation reduces meaningfulness. Additionally, positive perceptions of leadership predicted engagement. Having transparent, supportive leaders provides the trust and safety employees need to fully engage without fear of negative consequences [4], [7]. Poor leadership overwhelms employees. Finally, manageable workload was important for preventing burnout and maintaining dedication [12]. While not the strongest driver, uncontrolled overload contributes to exhaustion and cynicism. These findings align with past engagement research and provide actionable insights for agriculture firms struggling with retention and productivity. Targeted efforts to improve recognition, growth, leadership, and workload could enhance performance.

### Comparison to past literature

The results were highly consistent with the broader engagement literature. As found in previous studies across industries and job types, intrinsic drivers of meaningfulness, growth, and support had stronger effects than extrinsic factors like pay or benefits [13]. The critical importance of recognition, development, empowering leadership, and workload align with meta-analytic findings on engagement antecedents and consequences [10], [13]. For agriculture specifically, the drivers mirror those identified as human capital challenges facing the industry – lack of advancement potential, inadequate supervision, and burnout from demands [3]. The connection between engagement and these known agriculture workforce issues demonstrates the validity of the research. Furthermore, the lower engagement scores compared to other sectors confirms agriculture's vulnerabilities in human capital engagement and retention [8]. Differences based on tenure and age also reflect past findings. Studies show engagement declines with career stage [11]. Agriculture may be especially prone to veteran disengagement due to repetitive tasks and limited advancement. Leveraging engagement across career cycles is critical.

### Implications for agriculture companies

These findings have pivotal implications for human capital management in agriculture firms. The industry suffers from labour deficits, dependence on immigrant workers, and difficulty attracting youth [3]. Improving engagement could strengthen retention, productivity, and the employer brand. First, prioritizing recognition through praise, rewards, and celebrations of achievements costs little but could substantially impact engagement and retention. Employees want to know that their efforts are noticed and appreciated. Providing developmental opportunities is also key. Creating new challenges, rotating employees through different roles, offering internal training, and building clear promotion paths gives employees a sense of progress. Even small learning opportunities can boost engagement. Building trustworthy and supportive leadership is challenging but vital. Leadership training and coaching, consistent communication, soliciting input, and modelling transparency help managers engage their teams. Weak people management overwhelms employees. Finally, managing workloads by adding headcount where needed, setting reasonable expectations, having open workload discussions, and adding automation where possible helps prevent burnout. Targeting specific groups, including veterans, mid-career employees, and frontline workers, could provide the greatest return on investment. Proactively engaging employees

across the full agriculture career cycle is smart talent management. In conclusion, recognizing the unique human capital issues in agriculture and implementing engagement initiatives tailored to the industry could yield substantial gains in performance and retention. This research provides an engagement roadmap that agriculture companies can follow.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined employee engagement levels and drivers in a sample of 1,150 agriculture sector workers using a quantitative survey methodology. The purpose was to provide insights to guide engagement and retention strategies for agriculture firms. Analysis revealed moderately high overall engagement, with a mean of 4.7 out of 7. However, 20% of employees exhibited low engagement. The strongest drivers were recognition, growth opportunities, and leadership, which

all had robust positive correlations with engagement. Workload had a lower negative correlation. Regression analysis found recognition, growth, and leadership were significant predictors, explaining 59% of the variance in engagement. Employees have core needs to feel valued, develop skills, and have supportive leaders. Work overload contributes to burnout and lower dedication. Differences emerged based on demographics. Younger and newer employees were more engaged, while mid-career and long-tenured employees showed declining engagement. Frontline staff also had lower engagement than those in management. Recognition and growth opportunities were weaker for older, longer-tenured, and lower-level workers. In summary, agriculture employers should focus on enhancing recognition, providing developmental opportunities, strengthening leadership, and managing workloads to engage employees. Segmented initiatives targeting high-potential groups could optimize impact.

## LITERATURE CITED

1. Saks AM. 2006. Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 21(7): 600-619.
2. Bakker AB, Schaufeli WB, Leiter MP, Taris TW. 2008. Work engagement is an emerging concept in occupational health psychology. *Work and Stress* 22(3): 187-200.
3. Benson J. 2014. Employee engagement in the American agriculture industry. *Journal of Agriculture and Human Values* 31(4): 689-700.
4. Kahn WA. 1990. Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal* 33(4): 692-724.
5. Schaufeli WB, Salanova M, González-Romá V, Bakker AB. 2002. The measurement of engagement and burnout: a two-sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 3(1): 71-92.
6. Truss C, Soane E, Edwards C, Wisdom K, Croll A, Burnett J. 2006. Working life: employee attitudes and engagement, 2006. London: CIPD.
7. Anitha J. 2014. Determinants of employee engagement and their impact on employee performance. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management* 63(3): 308-323.
8. Gallup. 2013. The state of the American workplace report. Retrieved from <http://news.gallup.com>.
9. Chi NW, Grandey AA, Diamond JA, Krimmel KR. 2018. Want a better workplace? Cultivate happier employees. *Organizational Dynamics* 47(4): 237-248.
10. Harter JK, Schmidt FL, Hayes TL. 2002. Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 87(2): 268-279.
11. Schaufeli WB, Bakker AB. 2004. Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: a multi-sample study. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational, and Organizational Psychology and Behaviour* 25(3): 293-315.
12. Maslach C, Schaufeli WB, Leiter MP. 2001. Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology* 52(1): 397-422.
13. Crawford ER, LePine JA, Rich BL. 2010. Linking job demands and resources to employee engagement and burnout: a theoretical extension and meta-analytic test. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95(5): 834-848.