



From Engagement to Attachment: Rethinking Employee Commitment in Gig-Hybrid Work Systems

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Abstract – Contemporary organizations increasingly rely on non-traditional employment arrangements such as project-based assignments, contractual roles, and hybrid work models. While employee engagement has long been treated as a key indicator of organizational effectiveness, its relevance appears constrained in gig-hybrid contexts. Individuals working under such arrangements often demonstrate strong task involvement without developing a lasting psychological connection with the organization. This paper contends that employee engagement alone is insufficient to explain commitment in flexible employment structures and proposes employee attachment as a more comprehensive construct. Employee attachment reflects emotional bonding, organizational identification, and perceived psychological ownership that extend beyond task performance. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from gig-hybrid employees in the IT, education, and service sectors. The findings reveal that engagement is largely transactional in nature, whereas attachment exhibits a stronger relationship with retention intentions and sustained loyalty. The study advances HR literature by emphasizing employee attachment as a critical driver of long-term commitment in evolving work arrangements and provides actionable insights for strengthening workforce stability.

Keywords: Employee Attachment, Gig-Hybrid Employment, Organizational Commitment, Psychological Bonding, Workforce Flexibility

I. INTRODUCTION

The nature of employment has undergone a fundamental shift due to digitalization, platform-based labor markets, and changing career expectations. Organizations increasingly depend on professionals who operate across flexible, short-term, or hybrid work arrangements rather than traditional full-time roles. While these models enhance organizational agility, they simultaneously complicate the management of employee commitment.

Employee engagement has historically been positioned as a central mechanism for improving productivity, motivation, and retention. Engaged employees are typically characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and active involvement in their work roles. However, within gig-hybrid arrangements, high engagement does not necessarily translate into long-term organizational association. Workers may perform efficiently while remaining emotionally detached from the organization.

Recent workforce trends reveal a paradox wherein organizations report favorable engagement scores yet continue to face elevated attrition. Many professionals prioritize autonomy, skill portability, and flexibility over organizational loyalty. This disconnect highlights the limitations of engagement-focused models in explaining commitment within contemporary work systems.

To address this gap, the present study introduces employee attachment as a deeper construct that captures emotional connection, identity alignment, and a sense of belonging. By shifting attention from engagement to attachment, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of employee commitment in gig-hybrid work environments.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the limitations of employee engagement in explaining commitment within gig-hybrid roles
- To conceptualize employee attachment as a construct distinct from engagement
- To assess the impact of gig-hybrid work arrangements on employee attachment
- To suggest HR practices that foster attachment in flexible employment settings

III. HYPOTHESES

- H1: Employee engagement does not significantly predict long-term organizational commitment among gig-hybrid employees.
- H2: Employee attachment has a stronger positive relationship with retention intention than employee engagement in gig-hybrid roles.
- H3: Gig-hybrid work arrangements reduce emotional attachment while minimally affecting task-related engagement.

IV. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on gig-hybrid employees working in the IT services, education, and professional service sectors in India. The analysis centers on emotional and psychological aspects of employee-organization relationships over a six-month period. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. Fully independent freelancers and exclusively remote international workers were excluded.



V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Reliance on self-reported data may lead to subjective bias
- Findings may not be generalizable to purely gig-based or traditional full-time employment models
- Dynamic changes in work structures may influence employee perceptions during the study period

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature strongly associates employee engagement with positive organizational outcomes such as improved performance, job satisfaction, and reduced burnout. Traditional commitment theories categorize employee commitment into affective, continuance, and normative dimensions.

However, studies on gig work emphasize the transactional nature of modern employment relationships. Gig and hybrid workers often prioritize project completion over emotional affiliation with organizations. Research on hybrid work environments further reports weakened social bonds, reduced organizational identification, and fragmented psychological contracts.

Scholars increasingly argue that engagement-focused frameworks overlook deeper emotional and identity-based connections. While engagement captures enthusiasm toward work tasks, it fails to fully explain long-term organizational commitment. This gap underlines the relevance of employee attachment as a complementary and necessary construct.

VII. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework positions gig-hybrid work arrangements as an antecedent influencing both employee engagement and employee attachment. Engagement primarily affects short-term performance outcomes, whereas attachment shapes long-term loyalty, commitment, and retention. HR practices such as recognition, inclusive culture, leadership support, and career continuity act as moderating variables.

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

Descriptive and analytical research design

Data Collection:

- Primary Data: Structured questionnaires administered to 150 gig-hybrid employees
- Secondary Data: Academic journals, industry reports, and HR analytics publications

Sampling Technique:

Convenience sampling

Tools for Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics
- Correlation and regression analysis
- Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha

IX. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION (SUMMARY)

The analysis reveals that gig-hybrid employees exhibit moderate to high engagement levels but comparatively low organizational attachment. Engagement shows a weak association with retention intention, whereas attachment demonstrates a strong positive relationship. Respondents often described themselves as professionally committed but emotionally distant, reinforcing the conceptual distinction between engagement and attachment.

X. FINDINGS

- High engagement does not guarantee retention in gig-hybrid roles
- Employee attachment is a stronger predictor of sustained commitment
- Flexible work arrangements weaken emotional bonds unless supported by targeted HR initiatives

XI. SUGGESTIONS AND HR IMPLICATIONS

- Expand HR metrics beyond engagement to include attachment indicators
- Integrate gig-hybrid employees into organizational culture through inclusive practices
- Redefine psychological contracts to emphasize belonging and identity
- Encourage leadership behaviors that foster emotional and relational connections

XII. CONCLUSION

As employment structures continue to evolve, organizations must move beyond traditional engagement-centric models of commitment. This study establishes employee attachment as a critical determinant of long-term commitment in gig-hybrid work arrangements. Organizations that rely solely on engagement may sustain performance but struggle with retention. Attachment-oriented HR strategies can help build a stable, committed, and future-ready workforce.



14. REFERENCES

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