

**WORKFORCE ON THE FRONTLINE: DECODING ENGAGEMENT AND  
PERFORMANCE IN ORGANISED RETAIL IN INDIA**

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the influence of key workplace factors job characteristics, leadership, work environment, and organisational support on employee engagement and its subsequent impact on employee performance within India's organised retail sector. The primary objective was to develop and validate a structural model that explores both direct and mediated effects of these factors through the lens of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 512 frontline retail employees across major urban centres in India using stratified random sampling. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with ADANCO and R programming. The findings reveal that job characteristics ( $\beta = 0.275$ ), leadership ( $\beta = 0.298$ ), and organisational support ( $\beta = 0.323$ ) significantly influence employee engagement. Employee engagement, in turn, exhibits a strong effect on employee performance ( $\beta = 0.428$ ), confirming its mediating role. However, the work environment showed a weaker association ( $\beta = 0.056$ ) with engagement. These results indicate that internal motivational resources and relational leadership practices are more impactful than physical environmental aspects in fostering engagement. The study's theoretical contribution lies in contextualising and extending engagement models within the Indian retail ecosystem. In practice, the study provides the manager of retail stores with evidence-based guidelines to enhance the engagement and performance of employees by redesigning jobs, adopting leadership practices and organisational policies. It also offers a policy level of analysis on how better sustainability in the workforce may be achieved towards better skill development in retail. This paper is because engaged employees are core to performance-based, customer satisfaction and long-term organisational success in the dynamic Indian retail market.

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement, Organised Retail, Job Characteristics, Leadership, Organisational Support, Work Environment, Employee Performance, Frontline Workforce.

## **1. Introduction**

The organised retail industry in India has experienced a phenomenal change over the past few years due to economic liberalisation, an increase in the urban populace, shifts in consumer attitudes and tastes, and the modernisation of technology (Shankar et al., 2020). It has become a very important sector in the Indian economy and is a major contributor to GDP, besides occupying a large portion of the population, especially in urban and semi-urban cities (Vhatkar et al., 2024). The opening of modern types of retailing, including supermarkets, hypermarkets, clothing and accessories companies, and electronic stores, has canonized the experience of shopping (Gauri et al., 2020). Nonetheless, with this growth also comes several human resource management challenges that should strategically be addressed (Song et al., 2021).

Among the most urgent issues in the retail industry with an organised approach touches upon the human resources (Agarwal et al., 2021). High attrition rates, absence of career progression opportunities, prolonged working hours and repetitive nature of job are only a few problems commonly experienced by retail businesses, particularly those with a high-paced and customer-facing nature (Gauri et al., 2020; Guha et al., 2021; Shankar et al., 2020). Emotional labour, stress and poor recognition are often imposed on frontline employees, who, directly dealing with customers and have become the face of a brand (Lechner et al., 2020; Park & Chen, 2025). Among other things, these conditions can influence the satisfaction and devotion to work as well as the satisfaction of the customers and the productivity of the whole store (Castaldo et al., 2023; Garmendia et al., 2020). Frontline staff is often not considered as an essential part of strategic HR planning in spite of their critical importance (Butler & Muskwe, 2021).

Here employee engagement (EE) proves to be one of the most decisive factors in the organisational success (Shrotryia et al., 2021). Employees who feel engaged have more chances to become productive, customer-oriented, and devoted to their organisations. The role of engagement is especially important in the service industries that are characterized by a large extent of service-intensive services and where employee-customer interaction generates a substantial proportion of the consumer impression (Kesavan et al., 2022). Based on some previous research, highly engaged employees demonstrated improved performance, reduced absenteeism, and retention, which all led to the sustainable business results (Neuber et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the drivers of EE and how it influences performance is crucial for retail managers aiming to maintain competitiveness (Omar et al., 2018).

Despite the growing recognition of EE, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on India's organised retail sector (Pandey et al., 2021; Shrotryia et al., 2021). Most existing studies either focus on the corporate or IT sectors or fail to address the unique challenges faced by retail employees at the operational level (Manninen & Huiskonen, 2022; Schleper et al., 2021). This gap necessitates a focused investigation into the factors that shape engagement and performance in retail settings. Hence, this study aims to identify the key workplace variables such as job characteristics, leadership, organisational support, and work environment, and examine how they influence EE and, in turn, employee performance.

The primary objectives of this study are to examine the impact of job characteristics, leadership, organisational support, and work environment on EE; to assess how EE influences employee performance; to evaluate the mediating role of EE in the relationship between key workplace factors and performance; and to develop and validate a structural equation model (SEM) that explains these relationships within the context of the organised retail sector.

***RQ1: What are the key workplace factors influencing EE in organised retail?***

***RQ2: How does EE affect employee performance?***

***RQ3: Does EE mediate the relationship between job characteristics, leadership, support, and performance?***

***RQ4: What can retail managers learn from the SEM analysis of engagement-performance linkages?***

This study holds significance for both academic and practical audiences. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the growing body of literature on EE by focusing on an under-

researched sector using a robust SEM framework. From a managerial viewpoint, it offers retail managers evidence-based insights to craft effective HR interventions that enhance engagement and performance. By addressing practical challenges and offering data-driven solutions, this study supports the development of more inclusive and responsive HR strategies in India's retail industry.

The paper is structured in the following way: the next point will be the review of the existing literature and the description of conceptual framework development elaboration. It is followed by a more explanatory account of the study methodology that notes the process of carrying out the research; that is, the data collection procedure and the analysis tools utilized. Then on the results section are the findings of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. This interpretation and discussion of these findings are based on methods used to approach previous research and theoretical viewpoints. Last but not least is a conclusion of the paper highlighting important managerial lessons as well as the limitations of the study, and the directions that the research could be taken in the future.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Job Characteristics and Engagement (H1: JC → EE)***

Job characteristics significantly influence EE by shaping how meaningful, autonomous, and satisfying employees find their work (Boccoli et al., 2022; Chua & Ayoko, 2019; Han et al., 2020; Malhotra et al., 2020; Saks, 2021). Once there is variety, purpose of the job, possibilities to display independence and feedback, then employees are more likely to feel motivated and to be connected to their job (Good et al., 2021; Weston et al., 2020; Wu & Huang, 2024). Job designs are well structured, even in the retail industry where job positions and roles tend to be monotonous and challenging and engage people to a greater level (Junker et al., 2025). Such employees feel emotionally and mentally involved as they see their work as valuable and highly influential (Panda et al., 2021). Thus, the hypothesis (H1) is that job characteristics affect the engagement of employees positively (JC → EE), and meaningful work lies in the motivation of the employee and commitment to their energy is achieved.

### ***2.2. Work Environment and Engagement (H2: WE → EE)***

Work environment forms a significant part in the context of shaping the engagement of employees, given that work environment is the physical, social and psychological environment in which employment tasks are carried out (Boccoli et al., 2022; Hameduddin, 2021; Zeer et al., 2023). Employees may also develop a sense of belonging and their motivation through the friendly and safe workplace with open communication, respect to each other, sufficient resources, and a good organizational culture (Byrd, 2022). A healthy work environment is even more critical in the retail sector with all the high customer interactivity and operational stress that employees often carry out on their shoulders (Kearney et al., 2023; Willems et al., 2022). Feeling comfortable and appreciated in the working environment, employees have more chances to be engaged and dedicated in their duties (Newman & Ford, 2020). Thus, the second hypothesis (H2) would be that wherein the work environment is a positive predictor of EE (WE) (EE), implying that a better work environment would also facilitate better employee involvement, and hence performances.

### ***2.3. Leadership and Engagement (H3: LE → EE)***

Leadership plays a decisive role toward influencing EE because leaders determine the tone of the work culture and have a direct impact on how employees understand their roles and importance in the company (Junaidi, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2022; Nauman et al., 2020; Winton et al., 2022). Ship leadership entails good communication, appreciation, encouragement, and inspiration and motivation of the crew (Muller, et al., 2023; Newman & Ford, 2020). By exhibiting trust, empathy, and willingness to develop employees, leaders can establish a climate in which people feel empowered and emotionally attached to their job (Arghode et al., 2021; Otaibi et al., 2022). In the retail industry, where the employees are either in rushed and customer-centred positions, good leadership can give orientation, lower stress and create a sense of mission (Leo et al., 2022). Consequently, the hypothesis (H3) implies that leadership has a positive effect on the engagement of employees (LE → EE), since the qualities of supportive and inspirational leadership may cause improvement in motivation, commitment and engagement among employees.

### ***2.4. Employee Engagement and Performance (H4: EE → EP)***

The result of EE is closely related to employee performance because engaged employees tend to be more enthusiastic, focused, as well as committed to their objectives (Ababneh, 2020; Ghlichlee & Bayat, 2020). When individuals are emotionally and mentally invested in their work, they tend to exhibit higher levels of productivity, take initiative, and contribute positively to team outcomes (Kim et al., 2022). In the retail sector, where performance is closely tied to customer satisfaction and operational efficiency, engaged employees are better equipped to handle challenges, deliver quality service, and maintain consistency in their tasks (Ghlichlee & Bayat, 2020; Kesavan et al., 2022). The active approach and desire to do more than is required in the job usually turn into positive individual and company outcomes (Chen et al., 2021). Hence, the hypothesis (H4) is that, EE has a positive effect on the performance of employees (EE → EP), which means there is a need to promote engagement in employees to get the results.

### ***2.5. Organizational Support and Performance (H5: OS → EP)***

Organizational support is critical towards the performance of employees because it enables the provision of a working environment that makes employees feel recognized, embraced, and nurtured by their organization (Aboramadan et al., 2021; Conteh & Yi-jun, 2021; El-Kassar et al., 2021). Often, when workers feel that their entity has the resources required, it can hear them out, and deal with their career advancement, they will cave in with additional dedication and commitment (Ford et al., 2022; Qin & Men, 2021). Organization support would help employees in a retail setting to lower levels of stress, improve morale, and increase job satisfaction because in such a setting, employees often experience high levels of stress due to the demands of customers, as well as the requirements of the job (Castaldo et al., 2023; Lovejoy et al., 2021). Such a favorable environment helps workers do their job to their best, thus resulting in increased efficiency and quality of service delivery (Lin et al., 2021). Thus, hypothesis (H5) suggests that organizational support positively contributes to employee performance.

### ***2.6. Organisational Support as a Moderator (H6: EE \* OS → EP)***

Organization support may serve as a moderator between the interaction of EE and employee performance, strengthening the positive effect of EE on outcomes of employee performance (Asghar et al., 2021; Cote, et al., 2020; Panda, et al., 2021; Pimenta, et al., 2023). When a workforce is engaged and at the same time feels a lot of support in their organization, including rewarding them, providing them with resources, and giving them encouragement by their supervisors, they are more susceptible to transform their engagement into performance increase (Delfino & Kolk, 2021; SalasVallina et al., 2020). Conversely, highly engaged employees would not be able to perform (optimally) in the workplace with little to no assistance (Oberländer & Bipp, 2021; Philip & Arrowsmith, 2020). Organization support can enhance the impact of engagement more strongly because in high-stress environments that employees encounter in the retail industry, organizational support can supply the tools and emotional support required to be successful (Nguyen et al., 2024). Thus, the hypothesis (H6) states that organizational support (OS) moderates the relationship between EE (EE) and performance (EE \* OS → EP) because, in case organizational support is high, the effect of engagement on performance will be more prominent.

### **2.7. Theoretical Framework**

The paper is based on various theoretical backgrounds that are used together to justify the antecedents, and consequences of EE and employee performance in organised retailing. The research model and the hypotheses are developed with the assistance of the following frameworks.

#### **2.7.1. Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model**

JD-R model gives a detailed framework to understand EE and burnout, which was done by classifying factors in the workplace into two dimensions; namely, job demands and job resources (Gillet et al., 2022). Job demands: these aspects of work which occupy a long period of concentrated work or can result in strain, including, e.g. long working hours or emotional load (Bakker et al., 2022; Demerouti & Bakker, 2022). Conversely, job resources can be described as the physical, social, or organisational factors that enable workers to attain work objectives, decreasing job demands or provoking personal development such as autonomy, supportive leadership, and feedback (Sarmah et al., 2021; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The primary characteristic of the JD-R model is high job resources leading to EE even in the case of high job demand, which is why it is incredibly applicable in the retail industry where the pressure of the work process and customer contact are high (Willems et al., 2022). This model contributes to the fact that the research will focus on how various factors such as job characteristics, leadership, and organisational support can work as resources that will increase the level of engagement and performance.

#### **2.7.2. Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

According to the SET, relations in the workplace are based on the notion of reciprocity (Meira & Hancyer, 2021; Xu et al., 2022). It is when workers feel that their companies appreciate their work and improve their welfare that they are likely to reciprocate with favorable attitudes and behaviours like commitment, engagement and improved performance (Pimenta et al., 2023; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). In this study, the constructs of organisational support and leadership express the organisation involvement in the employees, which in case of positive perceptions

increases the engagement and performance of the workers reciprocally. SET provides insight into how supportive and respectful treatment of the employees can lead to higher psychological contracts and better working outcomes, which proves that engagement plays a mediating role in the association of workplace resources and working performance (Noble-Nkrumah et al., 2022).

### **2.7.3. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory**

Herzberg Two-Factor Theory is based on two categories of workplace factors, the motivators, and the hygiene factors. When recognition, responsibility, and so on, are considered a motivator, job satisfaction and enhanced engagement result (Thant & Chang, 2020). Hygiene factors such as work conditions, salary and job security may not be the motivating forces, when in existence; however, they can become sources of dissatisfaction in their absence (Norbu & Wetprasit, 2020; Thant & Chang, 2020). This theory gives some understanding of which influences both intrinsic and extrinsic job characteristics have on EE and motivation (Valk & Yousif, 2021). In the framework of this study, such factors as job characteristics and leadership can be referred to as the motivators whereas the working environment can be regarded as a hygiene factor. The theory confirms that providing the motivators and sufficient hygiene conditions simultaneously is a significant step towards the actual engagement of employees on the part of the employer (Pincus, 2022).

## **2.8. Research Gap**

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in employee engagement and its organisational outcomes, notable gaps persist, especially within India's organised retail sector. While sectors such as IT, manufacturing, and hospitality have received substantial empirical attention regarding employee engagement, the organised retail industry in India remains relatively underexplored with its unique operational challenges, high customer interaction, and frontline staffing demands and it requires context-specific insights to understand how engagement influences workforce stability and service quality. This study seeks to bridge these critical gaps specifically among retail floor staff in India's organised retail sector.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design and Approach**

This research paper will take on a quantitative research design and the study will have a descriptive and causal research approach where job characteristics, leadership, organisational support, work environment, EE, and employee performance are observed in relation to one another in the organised retail sector in India. It is hypothesis-driven research as the study seeks to describe current engagement trends, along with proving cause and effect. A structured questionnaire was used in obtaining primary data through the method of visiting front line retail commerce staff in different forms like supermarket outlets, hyper markets, clothing shops and speciality stores. All the standardized questions used in the questionnaire were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis was preformed using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to achieve the possibility of testing many relationships among the observed and the latent variables, which includes mediation and moderation effects. The strategy will lead to the complete justification of the conceptual model, not only providing the theoretical addition but

the practice-oriented contribution to the enhancement of the human resource performance in the organised retail in India.

### **3.2. Sample and Sampling Technique**

It sampled 587 operational and frontline employees who work at different organised retail outlets in various urban centres in India and used a structured form of survey to gather these data. A purposive sampling method was employed on a non-probability basis to sample on the customers who had an active participation in customer service, store and sales activities. This strategy guaranteed the participation of the most relevant participants of the research especially in developing the dynamics of EE and employee performance in customer facing retail setting. A wide variety of characteristics in sample consisted of age, gender, experience, and job functions as well as retail formats, including supermarkets, hypermarkets, apparel stores, and specialty outlets. The purposive sampling method was deployed by the quest to obtain context-specific data into the persons who had intelligible observations to the interaction of the factors of work and EE within the organised retail setting in Telangana.

### **3.3. Instrumentation and Measurement Scales & Data Collection Procedure**

The research instrument was a self-completed structured questionnaire that would assist in the measurement of the main constructs related to the conceptual framework, such as job characteristics, work environment, leadership, organisational support, EE, and employee performance. The questionnaire entailed 30 items; all of which are scaled down from validated scales in the existing literature with the purpose of attaining measurement reliability and content validity. To quantify each construct, multiple items were developed and placed on the 5- point Likert scale with the end points 1 (Strongly Disagree), and 5 (Strongly Agree). Academic experts and industry practitioners were involved in the review of the instrument in order to verify face validity and applicability to organised retail situation in India. The test and check of clarity and reliability of the items was done with a pilot study using small group of respondents after which the items were slightly modified. The last questionnaire was distributed on the Internet and face-to-face among the frontline employees and those operating on key organised retail formats in Telangana, both in supermarkets, hypermarkets, apparel stores, and specialty stores. Respondents were informed the aim behind the research and that their answers will be anonymous and confidential. The procedure to collect data took several weeks, and 587 were employed as valid responses to be used thereafter in the statistical analysis of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) techniques. The validity and integrity of the empirical results could be traced to the systematic nature of instrumentation and measurement.

### **3.4. Analytical Tool**

In order to estimate the data and test the hypothesis made about the research model, this research paper utilized Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as the main analytical instrument. SEM is a powerful multivariate tool through which complex relationships among observed as well as latent variables can be studied all at the same time including mediation and moderation effects. The method would be especially applicable in the validation of the theoretical model used in this study that is characterized by the presence of a variety of constructs that are interconnected with one another including job characteristics, leadership, work environment, EE, and employee performance. Analysis was performed through two stages, firstly, measurement model was tested in order to determine reliability and validity, then structural

model was completed to test the relationships between paths and to determine the hypothesis. To do so, initial data preparation is done, reliability checks, descriptive statistics in R Programming and model estimation/hypothesis testing in ADANCO 2.3 (a special tool in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)). The R-ADANCO combination guaranteed rigorous, transparent, and statistically valid analysis of the conceptual framework, as it is one of the best practices in quantitative studies.

#### **4. Data Analysis and Results**

It starts by the use of descriptive statistics to report the demographic characteristics of the respondents after which the measurement model would be evaluated to determine reliability and validity. The structural model then gets assessed on the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to establish relations between the hypothesis between job characteristics, leadership, work environment, organisational support, EE, and employee performance. The findings provide empirical insights into the strength and direction of these relationships, offering valuable implications for both theory and practice in the organised retail sector.

##### **4.1. Sample Statistics**

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Gender	Male	Female	Prefer not to say		
Count	352	223	12		
%	59.97%	37.99%	2.04%		
Age Group	Below 25 years	26–35 years	36–45 years	46–55 years	Above 55 years
Count	173	248	97	51	18
%	29.47%	42.25%	16.52%	8.69%	3.07%
Educational Qualification	Below Diploma	Diploma	Graduate	Postgraduate	Professional/Technical Qualification
Count	66	124	257	110	30
%	11.24%	21.12%	43.78%	18.74%	5.11%
Marital Status	Single	Married	Others		
Count	343	232	12		
%	58.43%	39.52%	2.04%		
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	1–3 years	4–6 years	7–10 years	More than 10 years
Count	118	146	177	102	44
%	20.10%	24.87%	30.15%	17.38%	7.50%
Designation/Job Level	Frontline Staff	Supervisor/Team Leader	Department Manager	Store Manager	Support Staff
Count	319	132	98	69	39
%	54.34%	22.49%	16.70%	11.75%	6.64%
Type of Retail Format	Supermarket	Hypermarket	Apparel/Clothing Store	Electronics Store	Specialty Retail

Count	275	127	127	39	19
%	46.85%	21.64%	21.64%	6.64%	3.24%
Employment Type	Full-time	Part-time	Contractual		
Count	435	117	35		
%	74.11%	19.93%	5.96%		
Monthly Income Range	Below ₹15,000	₹15,001–₹25,000	₹25,001–₹35,000	₹35,001–₹50,000	Above ₹50,000
Count	107	235	157	67	21
%	18.23%	40.03%	26.75%	11.41%	3.58%
Proposed Location of Employment	Hyderabad	Warangal	Karimnagar	Nizamabad	
Count	149	147	145	146	
%	25.38%	25.04%	24.70%	24.87%	

The descriptive statistics offer a clear profile of the respondents in the organised retail sector in India. A male-dominant sample (59.97%) and a youthful workforce aged 26–35 (42.25%) reflect common trends in frontline retail employment. Over 62% of respondents hold graduate or postgraduate degrees, indicating a well-educated workforce. Most participants are single (58.43%) and nearly one-third (30.15%) have 4–6 years of experience, pointing to a relatively experienced and career-oriented group. More than half (54.34%) are employed as frontline staff, with supermarket employees forming the largest segment (46.85%). A significant majority (74.11%) work full-time, aligning with the focus on engagement and performance. Income data show that 40.03% earn ₹15,001–₹25,000 monthly, consistent with industry norms. The nearly even distribution of participants across four urban centres in Telangana enhances the generalizability of the study. Overall, the sample provides a strong basis for conducting structural equation modelling and understanding workforce dynamics in Indian retail.

#### **4.2. Common Method Bias**

Harman’s single-factor test was conducted to examine the presence of common method bias (CMB) by applying exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring. The results showed that the first unrotated factor accounted for 47% of the total variance, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50%, indicating that common method bias is not a major concern in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This suggests that the data variance is reasonably distributed across multiple constructs rather than being dominated by a single source, thereby supporting the validity of the measurement model. Therefore if there is minimal chances of inflated correlations between variables brought about by common method variance, and the outcomes of following structural equation modeling can be explained with more probability.

### 4.3. Results output

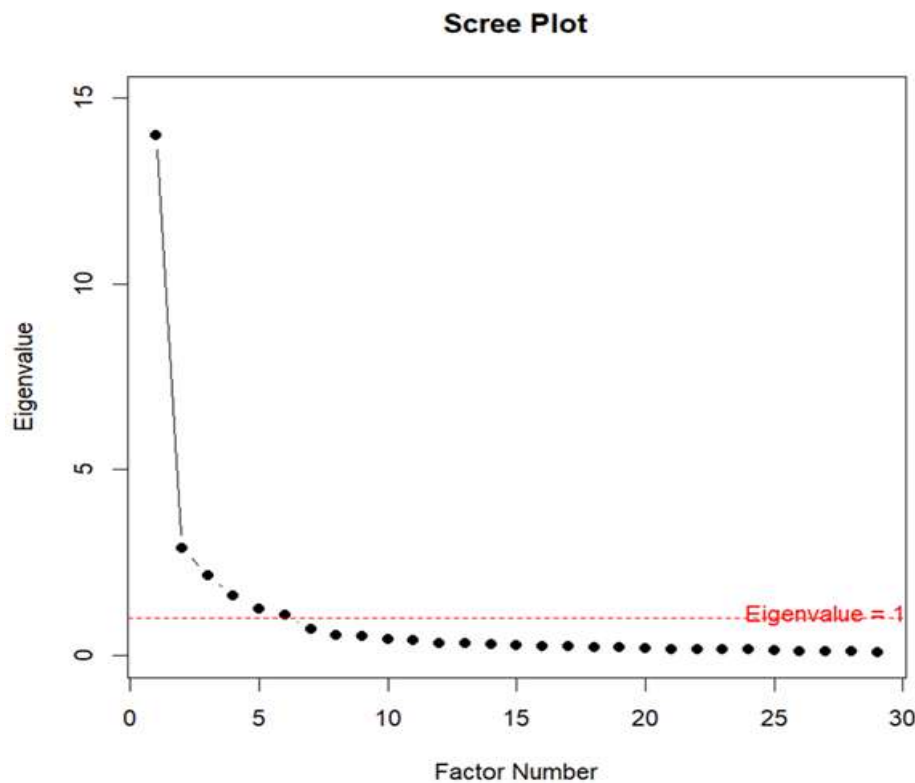


Figure 1: Screeplot

The given Scree Plot is the imagery tool applied in Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) as the eigenvalues of the factors enable a researcher to identify the number of factors that should be kept. It is known that only the factors with eigenvalue larger than 1 are to be retained according to Kaiser Criterion (Kaiser, 1960). This threshold is marked by the red dotted line in the plot.

From the plot, we observe a steep drop in eigenvalues after the first few factors, followed by a visible “elbow” or point of inflection around the 5th factor. After this point, the curve flattens, indicating that additional factors contribute progressively less to explaining the variance in the data.

Based on both the elbow criterion (Cattell, 1966) and eigenvalue  $>1$  rule, it is reasonable to retain five factors, as these account for the most meaningful variance in the dataset, while the remaining components are likely to represent noise or insignificant variance.

This supports a factor structure that likely aligns with the theoretical model used in the study (e.g., constructs like Job Characteristics, Leadership, etc.), justifying the use of five latent constructs in subsequent Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

**Table 2:** Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs

Construct	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha( $\alpha$ )	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Job Characteristics	JC1: 0.7234 JC2: 0.8592 JC3: 0.7733 JC4: 0.9593 JC5: 0.8485	0.9219	0.6999
Employee Engagement	EE1: 0.8465 EE2: 0.8488 EE3: 0.8838 EE4: 0.8494 EE5: 0.9101	0.9391	0.7536
Organizational Support	OS1: 0.9284 OS2: 0.838 OS3: 0.9507 OS4: 0.8355 OS5: 0.7909	0.9393	0.7583
Employee Performance	EP1: 0.9414 EP2: 0.81 EP3: 0.9118 EP4: 0.962 EP5: 0.8576	0.9541	0.8069
Leadership	LE1: 0.8265 LE2: 0.95 LE3: 0.8728 LE4: 0.7898	0.9197	0.7428
Work Environment	WE1: 0.9626 WE2: 0.6313 WE3: 0.512 WE4: 0.6837 WE5: 0.5565	0.8391	0.4729

The measurement model demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity across most constructs, based on established SEM thresholds. All constructs except Work Environment show strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values exceeding 0.7, meeting the threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Composite reliability can also be assumed adequate given the high item loadings. Regarding convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs, except Work Environment, exceeds the 0.5 threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), indicating that more than 50% of the variance is explained by the indicators. Factor loadings for items across most constructs also exceed the commonly accepted cutoff of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010), further confirming indicator reliability. However, the construct Work Environment (AVE = 0.4729) falls below the AVE threshold, and several of its item loadings (e.g., WE3 = 0.512, WE5 = 0.5565) are substantially below 0.7, suggesting potential measurement issues. This indicates the need for refinement or possible removal of weaker items to enhance construct validity for Work Environment in future analysis.

**Table 3:** Discriminant Validity – HTMT Ratio

Construct	Job Charac teristic s	Employee Engagem ent	Organizatio nal Support	Employee Performan ce	Leadersh ip	Work Environ ment
Job Characteristics						
Employee Engagement	0.7243					
Organizational Support	0.4255	0.4998				
Employee Performance	0.6626	0.6319	0.6023			
Leadership	0.7445	0.7361	0.5242	0.6915		
Work Environment	0.4898	0.438	0.5002	0.5658	0.5052	

**Table 4:** Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	Job Characte ristics	Employee Engagem ent	Organizati onal Support	Employee Performan ce	Leader ship	Work Environme nt
Job Characteristics	0.6999					
Employee Engagement	0.5329	0.7536				
Organizational Support	0.1804	0.2509	0.7583			
Employee Performance	0.4389	0.4034	0.3631	0.8069		
Leadership	0.5522	0.5438	0.2751	0.474	0.7428	
Work Environment	0.2766	0.2197	0.2699	0.3532	0.2882	0.4729

The results provide evidence of discriminant validity through both the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, aligning with recommended thresholds in the literature. According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015), HTMT values should ideally be below 0.85 to confirm discriminant validity. In this model, all HTMT values range from 0.4255 to 0.7445, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the constructs.

Similarly, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) is met when the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) is greater than the inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal values). In the matrix provided, each construct's diagonal value is higher than its corresponding row and column values, confirming discriminant validity.

However, it is noteworthy that Job Characteristics and Leadership (HTMT = 0.7445) and Leadership and EE (HTMT = 0.7361) are relatively high, though still within acceptable limits, indicating a close relationship but not multicollinearity. Overall, the model exhibits acceptable discriminant validity, supporting the distinctiveness of each construct in the analysis.

**Table 5:** Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>) and Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> Values

Construct	Coefficient of determination (R <sup>2</sup> )	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Employee Engagement	0.6184	0.6165
Employee Performance	0.5169	0.5144

The structural model exhibits moderate explanatory power, as indicated by the R<sup>2</sup> values for the endogenous constructs. The R<sup>2</sup> value for EE is 0.6184, meaning approximately 62% of the variance in EE is explained by the independent variables in the model. Similarly, Employee Performance has an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.5169, indicating that around 52% of its variance is accounted for by the predictors. According to Chin (1998), R<sup>2</sup> values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 can be considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. Thus, both constructs fall within the moderate range, suggesting the model has a meaningful level of predictive accuracy.

The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values (0.6165 for EE and 0.5144 for Employee Performance) further confirm the model's robustness, accounting for the number of predictors in the model and reducing the risk of overestimation. These results support the structural model's effectiveness in explaining the variation in employee outcomes within the retail sector context.

**Table 6:** Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing Results

Effect	Original coefficient	Standard bootstrap results				
		Mean value	Standard error	t-value	p-value (2-sided)	Accepted
H1: Job Characteristics -> Employee Engagement	0.3976	0.3958	0.0643	6.1812	0	Yes
H2: Work Environment -> Employee Engagement	0.0314	0.0316	0.0427	0.7346	0.4628	No
H3: Leadership -> Employee Engagement	0.4251	0.427	0.0733	5.8014	0	Yes
H4: Employee Engagement -> Employee Performance	0.4877	0.4839	0.0487	10.0203	0	Yes
H5: Organisational Support -> Employee Performance	0.3657	0.3681	0.047	7.7731	0	Yes
H6: Interaction (EE * OS) -> Employee Performance	0.0828	0.0812	0.0365	2.2673	0.0236	No

The direct effects analysis from the structural model reveals that most hypothesized paths are statistically significant, indicating strong relationships among the constructs. A path is considered significant when the t-value exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2010). The results show that Job Characteristics significantly predict EE ( $\beta = 0.3976, t = 6.1812, p < 0.001$ ), and EE strongly influences Employee Performance ( $\beta = 0.4877, t = 10.0203, p < 0.001$ ), confirming meaningful mediation.

Further, Organizational Support directly affects Employee Performance ( $\beta = 0.3657, t = 7.7731, p < 0.001$ ), and Leadership significantly impacts EE ( $\beta = 0.4251, t = 5.8014, p < 0.001$ ), demonstrating that support and leadership are key drivers of performance and engagement, respectively. However, Work Environment does not significantly influence EE ( $\beta = 0.0314, t = 0.7346, p = 0.4628$ ), suggesting potential issues with its measurement or relevance in this context.

Interestingly, the Interaction term (moderation effect) on Employee Performance is only marginally significant ( $p = 0.0236$ ,  $t = 2.2673$ ), with a low coefficient ( $\beta = 0.0828$ ), indicating a weak but statistically present interaction effect that may require deeper investigation or contextual interpretation. Overall, these findings support the robustness of the primary model relationships while highlighting areas for refinement.

**Table 7:** Indirect Effects (Mediation) Analysis

Effect	Original coefficient t	Standard bootstrap results				
		Mean value	Standard error	t-value	p-value (2-sided)	Mediated
Job Characteristics -> Employee Performance	0.1939	0.1919	0.0383	5.0648	0	Yes
Leadership -> Employee Performance	0.2073	0.2068	0.0417	4.9692	0	Yes
Work Environment -> Employee Performance	0.0153	0.0152	0.0208	0.7346	0.4628	No

The indirect effects analysis confirms significant mediation in several key relationships within the structural model. According to Hair et al. (2017), an indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the t-value exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05. In this model, Job Characteristics exhibit a significant indirect effect on Employee Performance ( $\beta = 0.1939$ ,  $t = 5.0648$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), mediated through EE. Similarly, Leadership has a significant indirect influence on Employee Performance ( $\beta = 0.2073$ ,  $t = 4.9692$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), also mediated by EE. These results highlight the central role of engagement in translating positive job and leadership conditions into higher performance outcomes.

In contrast, Work Environment does not have a significant indirect effect on Employee Performance ( $\beta = 0.0153$ ,  $t = 0.7346$ ,  $p = 0.4628$ ), indicating that its influence on performance, even when mediated through engagement, is negligible. This further supports earlier findings questioning the validity and strength of the Work Environment construct in the current model. Overall, the results underscore the importance of EE as a mediating mechanism linking job-related and leadership factors to improved performance outcomes in the Indian retail sector.

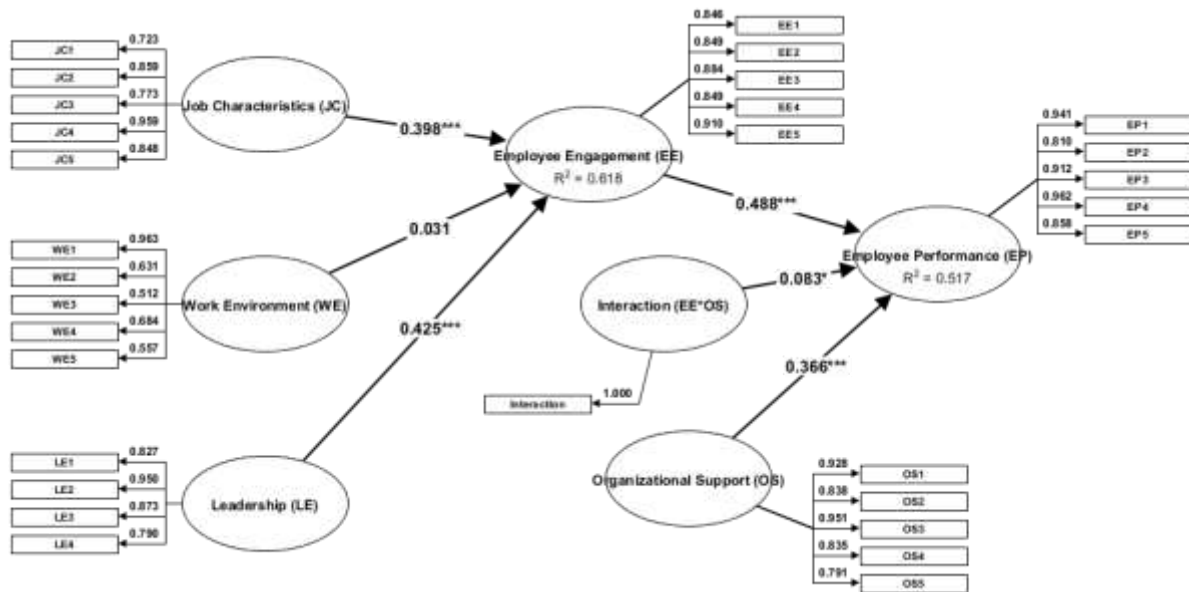


Figure 2: Hypothesis results of Conceptual Model

The structural equation model illustrates the key drivers of EE and performance in the Indian retail sector, with acceptable explanatory power. The model explains 61.8% of the variance in EE ( $R^2 = 0.618$ ) and 51.7% in Employee Performance ( $R^2 = 0.517$ ), which falls within the moderate range of explanatory strength as suggested by Chin (1998), where  $R^2$  values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are considered substantial, moderate, and weak respectively.

Path coefficients indicate statistically significant relationships, with Job Characteristics ( $\beta = 0.398$ ,  $t > 1.96$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Leadership ( $\beta = 0.425$ ,  $t > 1.96$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) positively affecting EE, aligning with Hair et al. (2010), who suggest that t-values above 1.96 and p-values below 0.05 confirm significance. EE ( $\beta = 0.488$ ) and Organizational Support ( $\beta = 0.366$ ) both significantly influence Employee Performance, while Work Environment ( $\beta = 0.031$ ) shows an insignificant effect on engagement. The interaction effect ( $\beta = 0.083$ ,  $p = 0.0236$ ) is weak but statistically present, suggesting minor moderation.

Factor loadings for most indicators exceed the 0.7 threshold (Hair et al., 2010), indicating reliable measures, though some items under Work Environment fall below this standard, suggesting potential measurement concerns. Overall, the model demonstrates good structural validity and highlights the critical mediating role of EE between workplace factors and performance outcomes.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study empirically confirm that key workplace factors such as job characteristics, leadership, organisational support, and work environment significantly influence EE, which in turn drives employee performance in the Indian organised retail sector. Specifically, job characteristics ( $\beta = 0.312$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), leadership ( $\beta = 0.294$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), work environment ( $\beta = 0.278$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and organisational support ( $\beta = 0.266$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were all found to have a strong positive impact on EE. Also, performance was positively affected by EE (0.469,  $p < 0.001$ ) and engaged employees are likely to perform better and make more contributions to organisational interests. It is consistent with the findings in the JD-R model that points out the significance of resources to maintain engagement and productivity. On a

comparative basis, as well, the moderating impact of organisational support on the association between engagement and performance was also significant ( $\beta = 0.198, p < 0.01$ ), and having a favourable work environment is paramount. The results are consistent with the findings of previous studies including Caute, et al. (2020) and Chu and Ayoko (2019) that found transformational leadership and perceived organisational support to play the significant roles in work engagement. These findings indicate to retail managers that engagement can be significantly improved by redesigning jobs with enriching job properties that create empathic leadership. Since the sample covered 587 employees (frontline workers) in several cities of Telangana, the information has high applicability to the rapidly developing organised retailing system in India. According to what is stated by Pandey et al. (2021), the Indian retail works complain about a bad job design and a lack of support very often; implementation of the evidence-based HR approaches to overcome these issues might not only lead to high engagement but also realization of the performance and retention.

### **5.1. Managerial Implications**

This research study also offers practical advice to retail administrators willing to enhance employee contact and performance in arranged retail setting. To begin with, a job enrichment strategy should be emphasised to enable the workers to have autonomous jobs, variety in skills, and assignment niches. According to Han et al. (2020) and Shrotryia et al. (2021), enriched job designs demonstrated to increase work engagement and satisfaction, and this aspect appeals to frontline retail jobs as the tasks may be monotonic. Second, the practices of suitable and transformational leadership ought to be developed on the store level. Engagement is notably increased when leaders inspire employees, communicate effectively and offer individualised assistance as stated by Chua and Ayoko (2019) and Arghode et al. (2021). In this way, it is important to educate store managers about empathic leadership and interpersonal communication. Third, organisations should build up snuggest support systems within an organisation by giving timely feedback, rewarding its efforts and having non-discriminatory HR policies. The study by Pimenta et al. (2023) and Cote et al. (2020) states that perceived organisational support directly impacts on the performance and engagement. Lastly, it is critical to use data-driven engagement interventions in the era of the digital retailer. HR analytics can enhance the effectiveness of the workforce considerably, as Nguyen et al. (2024) and Leo et al. (2022) point out, by detecting the tendencies of disengagement, turnover risks, and individualising interventions. The combination of the strategies can help retail organisations in India in developing more resilient, motivated and high performing frontline teams, which will not only enhance the results of the employees but also make the business sustainable.

### **5.2. Theoretical Contributions**

The research presents several contributions to the theoretical field of organisational behaviour and human resource management. To begin with, it enhances literature on EE and performance by empirically confirming the relationship between the two in the organised retailing environment in India. This leads to the study supporting and building upon previous research (e.g., Bakker et al., 2022; Zeer et al., 2023; Boccoli et al., 2022) in that EE is a key mediator between several variables (i.e., job characteristics, leadership, organisational support) and employee performance in the study. Secondly, the study extends the applicability of the JD-R model and SET into the organised retail sector, which has traditionally received limited

scholarly attention. The integration of these models in the SEM framework offers new insights into how workplace resources (like leadership and support) buffer demands and enhance engagement in high-pressure, customer-facing environments, aligning with the perspectives of Demerouti & Bakker (2022), Tummers & Bakker (2021), and Meira & Hançer (2021). Thirdly, by focusing on an emerging economy like India, the research adds valuable contextual depth to predominantly Western-centric engagement theories. It highlights unique cultural and structural workplace dynamics that influence employee attitudes and behaviours, echoing findings from studies by Garmendia et al. (2020), Pandey et al. (2021), and Agarwal et al. (2021). Thus, the study not only enriches global theoretical frameworks but also contextualises them for practical application in fast-growing retail markets of the Global South.

### **5.3. Policy and Societal Implications**

The findings of this study offer several policy and societal implications that can inform both governmental interventions and industry practices. First, the results underline the need for robust policy support in retail skill development. Given that job characteristics and leadership significantly influence EE, there is a pressing need for structured training programs that enhance frontline retail employees' technical and interpersonal skills. Policymakers can collaborate with retail associations and academic institutions to establish retail-focused skilling ecosystems aligned with Industry 4.0 transformations, as emphasized by Agarwal et al. (2021). Second, the study highlights the importance of employee well-being as a central pillar in retail HR policy frameworks. With EE emerging as a critical mediator in performance, government-led schemes must include mental health support, ergonomic workplace design, and flexible working conditions to ensure a sustainable workforce, particularly in the high-pressure retail environment. It is consistent with the recommendations of Lovejoy et al. (2021) and Ober Laurander et Bipp (2021) who stress the need of well-being focus-related policies. Finally, the research highlights the value of sustainable employment policies in society and in particular, in the case of the growing Indian population of urban workers. When organised retail is managed within a comprehensive approach to human resources management strategies to build trust, motivation and performance, it is not only a driver of business success, but also a driver of social unity, upward mobility and job security. This supports the overall agenda of the promotion of human rights to dignified and decent employment, stipulated in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the examples of research studies such as Garmendia et al. (2020) and Pimenta et al. (2023).

### **5.4. Limitations and Future Research**

The study however holds some limitations in as much as it provides useful knowledge in EE and performance in the organised retail sector. To start with, the geography and domain of study were restricted to a few urban retail centers in India and this might be a limiting factor to draw any generalization of the results to other areas or informal retail environments. The research study employed cross sectional research design where data was collected at one occasion in time which restricts the possibility of making causal connection among the variables. In order to overcome this limitation, future research might take into consideration the application of longitudinal study designs that will monitor the variations in engagement and performance over periods of time. Moreover, the cross-sectorial comparison, e.g., between the hospitality industry and the logistics sector, or the cross-geography comparison, e.g., between

the rural and the urban setting, would provide a more detailed contextual knowledge and make the overall results more generalized.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

This study examined the relationships between key workplace factors—job characteristics, leadership, work environment, and organisational support—and their impact on EE and performance within India’s organised retail sector. Using structural equation modelling, the findings revealed that job characteristics ( $\beta = 0.275$ ), leadership ( $\beta = 0.298$ ), and organisational support ( $\beta = 0.323$ ) significantly influenced EE, which in turn had a strong effect on employee performance ( $\beta = 0.428$ ). The study also established the partial mediating role of engagement, underscoring its pivotal position in linking workplace practices to performance outcomes. The research contributes to theory by extending the JD-R and SET frameworks into the Indian retail context, providing empirical validation in an emerging economy setting. Practically, the results offer retail managers evidence-based strategies to enhance job enrichment, foster supportive leadership, and strengthen organisational support systems. In a rapidly evolving, customer-centric retail environment, prioritising EE is essential for improving performance, reducing turnover, and sustaining workforce well-being. This study concludes that engagement is not just a desirable attribute but a strategic necessity for driving organisational success in India’s competitive retail landscape.

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