*Journal of Management World* **2025**, 1: 1-8
DOI: 10.53935/jomw.v2024i4.450

# Enhancing Employee Engagement in Multinational Companies in Oman: An Exploration of Theoretical Concepts

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**Abstract.** This research establishes a theoretical framework aimed at improving employee engagement within multinational corporations (MNCs) in Oman. By leveraging established theories and models, including Kahn's Engagement Theory and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, the framework fuses global best practices with local considerations to confront the specific challenges confronted by Oman's varied workforce and hierarchical organizational structures. A systematic literature review is utilized to gain a thorough understanding of the topic. Key findings indicate that leadership, cultural alignment, and employee well-being are critical to enhancing engagement. The study draws on a systematic review of Scopus-indexed journals and relevant industry reports from the region, providing valuable insights for HR professionals and policymakers in Oman's MNCs. This paper aims to close the gap between theory and practice by offering a culturally tailored approach to engagement. The framework stands out by integrating international theories with strategies specifically designed for the dynamics of Oman's workforce. Furthermore, the study highlights practical implications for HR professionals in sectors such as oil and gas, retail, and tourism, presenting actionable strategies that address the socio-economic and cultural challenges faced in Oman.

**Keywords:** Employee Engagement, GCC Workforce, Leadership Strategies, Multinational Corporations, Oman, Organizational Culture.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is a crucial determinant of organizational performance, directly impacting productivity, innovation, and employee retention. However, companies in Oman face particular challenges, including high turnover rates among expatriates and hierarchical management structures. MNCs in Oman encounter unique issues due to the significant presence of expatriate workers and the structured workplace cultures characteristic of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies. Recent studies have highlighted the necessity for customized strategies in multicultural settings to effectively address these challenges (John & Ali, 2023). Despite the global recognition of the importance of engagement, research specifically focused on the GCC region, and Oman in particular, remains limited. For instance, many studies overlook Oman's distinctive combination of local and expatriate workforces, which necessitates customized engagement strategies. This study aims to bridge this gap by creating a theoretical framework that adjusts established engagement models to fit the socio-economic and cultural context of Oman. It prioritizes leadership styles, organizational culture, and employee well-being as essential components for fostering engagement. The framework seeks to provide practical recommendations for HR practitioners and policymakers, facilitating the development of inclusive and effective engagement strategies tailored to the needs of Oman's MNCs.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

1. To analyse prominent theories and models of employee engagement.
2. To identify specific engagement challenges encountered by MNCs in Oman.
3. To propose a comprehensive, culturally aware framework for enhancing engagement practices in Omani MNCs

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Employee engagement theories provide vital insights into the psychological, emotional, and behavioural elements that motivate employees and enhance productivity and retention within organizations. As noted by AlGhunaimi and AlGhenaimi (2024), employee engagement signifies the alignment of maximum satisfaction with maximum productivity, substantially impacting organizational success. For example, John and Ali (2023) emphasize the importance of integrating cultural alignment and inclusive practices when applying engagement models in diverse settings. These frameworks serve as the foundation for investigating employee engagement in MNCs in Oman, where unique cultural, economic, and organizational dynamics are evident.

### 2.1. Kahn's Engagement Theory

Kahn's (1990) theory identifies three psychological conditions essential for fostering employee engagement: Meaningfulness, safety, and availability. In the Omani context, the aspect of:

- Meaningfulness: is particularly challenged by limited career advancement opportunities available for expatriates. It relates to the perceived significance of work and its alignment with individual and

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organizational values. In Oman, expatriate workers often struggle to find meaningful work due to a lack of long-term growth possibilities.

- Safety: emphasizes the need for a secure environment where employees feel free from interpersonal and organizational threats. The hierarchical management structures common in GCC countries can restrict open communication, which can diminish the sense of safety (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).
- Availability: refers to the physical, emotional, and psychological resources employees bring to their roles. Organizations in Oman must ensure that employees have access to these necessary resources to promote engagement.

### 2.2. Zinger's Pyramid Model

The Zinger Model incorporates holistic engagement strategies, emphasizing well-being, collaboration, and recognition (Al Salmi, 2019). The Zinger Model's holistic approach is especially relevant in Oman, where fostering collaboration between diverse workforce segments is a key priority.

- The bottom tier of the pyramid prioritizes employee well-being through psychological safety and eliminating workplace discrimination.
- The middle tiers focus on fostering collaboration and teamwork to strengthen interpersonal relationships, which is particularly relevant in Oman's diverse workplaces.
- The top tier emphasizes productivity through goal clarity and consistent performance monitoring. For example, regular recognition of individual contributions in organizations like Sohar Aluminium has enhanced employee morale and engagement.

### 2.3. Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Herzberg's theory identifies two main categories of factors that affect employee satisfaction: motivators (such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility) and hygiene factors (like working conditions, salary, and job security) (ALSAFADI, 2021).

- In Oman, numerous multinational corporations primarily emphasize hygiene factors, including competitive salaries and job security, while frequently overlooking the motivators that enhance intrinsic engagement.
- Achieving a balance between these factors is essential for sustaining workforce stability and promoting innovation within competitive sectors. This is particularly relevant in Oman, where expatriates often express dissatisfaction regarding intrinsic motivators such as recognition and opportunities for career advancement. Aon Hewitt Model

This framework highlights three outcomes of engagement—Say, Stay, and Strive—that characterize a committed workforce (Osborne, 2017).

- Say pertains to how employees promote their organization. In the tourism and retail industries in Oman, engaged staff frequently advocate for the company's brand.
- Stay concerns the retention of employees. Omani multinational corporations encounter substantial turnover rates among expatriates, pointing to a necessity for improved retention strategies.
- Strive represents the additional effort employees are willing to put forth. Those in well-supported environments tend to go beyond expectations and attain organizational objectives.

### 2.4. Adaptation to Oman's Context

Although these models offer universal insights, their implementation in Oman necessitates adjustments to align with the region's distinct cultural and organizational traits.

- Leadership Approaches: Emphasizing collaborative and inclusive leadership is crucial for managing the cultural diversity present in Omani work environments.
- Workforce-Focused Programs: Initiatives that focus on employee well-being, effective communication, and career advancement can help reconcile global engagement strategies with the expectations of the local workforce. By integrating these theoretical frameworks with Oman-specific insights, organizations can build robust engagement strategies that align with both global best practices and regional nuances.

### 2.5. Research Gap

Although there is an increasing amount of literature on employee engagement, research specifically targeting multinational corporations (MNCs) in Oman and comparable Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies is still scarce. Much of the existing research draws conclusions from Western contexts, often ignoring the distinct cultural and demographic factors of the region. While studies such as John and Ali (2023) have investigated multicultural engagement strategies, they do not adequately focus on Oman's unique socio-cultural and organizational traits. For instance, research seldom considers how Oman's dependency on expatriate workers impacts engagement approaches. This extrapolation frequently misses essential elements such as the hierarchical management structure and collectivist cultural values that are characteristic of Oman. Specifically, the influence of expatriate workers—who represent a significant segment of the workforce in Oman—on the development of

organizational engagement strategies has been minimally addressed (Ali et al., 2017). This paper aims to fill this gap by proposing a framework that is specifically designed for Oman, integrating global best practices with localized insights. Although the primary focus is on Oman, the framework may also be relevant in other GCC nations or regions with similar workforce characteristics, establishing a basis for comparative research and wider implementation.

While current literature offers extensive insights into factors such as workplace environment, psychological climate, and organizational culture that affect employee engagement, it often lacks a thorough and integrated approach to promoting a commitment-driven organizational culture. This is especially pertinent in Oman, where workforce satisfaction is significantly impacted by views on equity and cultural integration. Numerous studies tend to concentrate on single aspects, like job satisfaction or organizational performance, but overlook the interaction of these factors within Oman's distinct socio-economic and cultural context. Moreover, the lack of strong empirical evidence and contextual case studies related to multinational corporations in Oman highlights a significant gap in existing research. Additionally, academic discourse on employee engagement often falls short of providing clear and actionable insights relevant to the context of the Sultanate. The translation of findings from broader studies into the Omani context is frequently insufficient or unclear, complicating the ability to reach definitive conclusions. This lack of contextual awareness emphasizes the necessity for research that caters to the region, which can yield more precise and applicable suggestions to enhance engagement in Omani MNCs.

An analysis of current research indicates that personal satisfaction and acknowledgment from the organization are essential factors influencing employee engagement. In Oman, employees report feeling most engaged when they believe that their contributions are appreciated. Other important elements affecting engagement include the quality of compensation packages, transparency, and the fairness of organizational practices, all of which are crucial in the engagement strategies employed by multinational corporations in Oman.

Nevertheless, the difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, including job losses, salary reductions, and the halt of promotions and hiring, have eroded trust between workers and employers worldwide, underscoring the need for holistic engagement strategies (Saratun, 2016).

This research addresses these gaps by demonstrating the intricate nature of employee engagement and motivation in Oman and suggesting a detailed framework designed for the specific requirements of multinational corporations active in the area. By integrating relevant theories and offering practical solutions, the research intends to boost productivity and performance through enhanced employee engagement initiatives.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a systematic literature review (SLR) method to create a theoretical framework aimed at improving employee engagement in multinational corporations (MNCs) that are active in Oman. The methodology is crafted to maintain rigor and relevance by integrating existing studies and situating them within the distinctive organizational and cultural contexts of the region. The decision to use the systematic literature review approach is based on its capacity to amalgamate current theoretical and empirical findings, thus offering a solid foundation for the proposed framework. Additionally, this approach helps identify gaps in empirical evidence, which will allow future research to test the framework through primary research techniques such as surveys and case studies. Below is a comprehensive outline of the methodology adopted:

### 3.1. Research Design

The research employs a conceptual analysis methodology, supported by a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature, with an emphasis on:

1. Theoretical Foundations: Integrating key engagement theories (such as Kahn's Theory and Zinger's Pyramid) to create a foundational framework.

2. Contextual Relevance: Analysing studies specific to the region that focus on employee engagement within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly in Oman.

3. Industry Insights: Utilizing results from case studies and organizational reports regarding engagement practices in multinational corporations (MNCs) functioning in Oman.

### 3.2. Data Sources

To ensure the theoretical framework's robustness, data sources were meticulously selected. These include:

- Scopus-Indexed Journals:
- Peer-reviewed articles published within the last decade, focusing on key themes such as employee engagement, organizational culture, and HR practices. Articles were further screened for relevance using Boolean operators and categorized based on their applicability to Oman's socio-economic context.

Articles were chosen based on their relevance to Oman's unique socio-economic context and categorized using Scopus journal quartile rankings (Q1–Q4).

- Government and Industry Reports:

Reports on Oman's labour market and MNC operations were analysed to provide region-specific insights. For example, recent statistics indicate that expatriates make up over 60% of Oman's workforce in key industries

like oil and gas (Oman Labor Market Report, 2021).

- **Seminal Conceptual Frameworks and Models**:

Foundational theories such as Kahn's Engagement Theory and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory were synthesized with contemporary models like the Aon Hewitt Model to address Oman-specific engagement challenges.

**Summary of Reviewed Sources**: A systematic search using keywords like "employee engagement," "multinational corporations," "Oman," "GCC workforce," and "organizational culture" was conducted. Boolean operators refined the results, focusing on articles meeting the following criteria:

- Published in Scopus-indexed Q1–Q4 journals.
- Directly addressing engagement practices applicable to Oman's unique context.
- Providing empirical or conceptual insights relevant to MNCs.

**Table 1:**

| Author(s) | Title | Year | Journal (Q) | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kahn (1990) | Psychological Conditions of Engagement | 1990 | Journal of Applied Psychology (Q1) | Identified meaningfulness, safety, and availability as drivers of engagement. |
| Al Salmi (2019) | Employee Engagement Strategies in GCC | 2019 | Gulf HR Management Journal (Q2) | Highlighted cultural challenges in GCC organizations, emphasizing leadership inclusivity. |
| Osman & Hammoud (2017) | Cross-cultural teams and hierarchies in Oman | 2017 | Middle East HR Journal (Q3) | Discussed the need for training and cultural alignment to overcome hierarchical barriers. |
| Oman Labor Market Report | Oman's Workforce Dynamics | 2021 | N/A | Provided statistics on expatriate workforce composition and turnover rates in Oman. |

### 3.3. Analytical Framework

The literature review was performed through the following steps:

1. Identification: A systematic search was conducted across relevant Scopus-indexed databases, including ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, and SpringerLink.

2. Screening: Articles were filtered for their relevance, peer-review status, and contextual relevance to Oman and MNCs.

3. Analysis: Key themes and models were identified, and the findings were organized into categories such as leadership, organizational culture, and regional challenges.

4. Synthesis: Theoretical and contextual insights were merged to create a comprehensive framework customized for Oman.

### 3.4. Rationale for Methodology

A systematic literature review was selected because there is a scarcity of empirical studies pertinent to the context of Oman. By integrating existing theoretical models and modifying them to fit the local setting, this study addresses the disconnect between leading global practices and regional organizational dynamics. This strategy facilitates a comprehensive conceptual grasp of employee engagement within Oman's multinational corporations (MNCs), which encounter distinct socio-cultural and organizational challenges. The systematic review compiles well-established engagement theories, such as Kahn's Engagement Theory, Zinger's Pyramid Model, Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, and the Aon Hewitt Model, along with research that emphasizes the particular challenges experienced by expatriate workers and culturally diverse teams in Oman. This compilation serves as the basis for creating a new theoretical framework adapted to the regional context.

### 3.5. Proposed Framework for Employee Engagement in Oman

This research introduces a detailed framework aimed at tackling the employee engagement issues encountered by multinational corporations (MNCs) in Oman. By drawing on insights from established theories such as Kahn's Engagement Theory, Zinger's Pyramid Model, and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, the framework combines global best practices with specific regional considerations. Its goal is to offer practical strategies for improving employee motivation, productivity, and retention within Oman's distinct socio-cultural and organizational context. The framework addresses gaps highlighted in the literature by focusing on the significance of culturally inclusive leadership, employee-focused initiatives, and sustainable engagement methods.

### 3.6. Framework Components

Although the framework is specifically designed for Oman's distinct socio-cultural circumstances, its elements—Leadership and Communication, Cultural Alignment, Employee Well-being, Recognition and Rewards, and Learning and Development—can be modified for similar areas, especially within the GCC. This flexibility increases its relevance for multinational companies working in culturally diverse environments.

### 3.7. The Suggested Framework Includes the Following Main Aspects

#### 3.7.1. Leadership and Communication

- Emphasizing collaborative and inclusive leadership approaches is vital for establishing trust and promoting psychological safety, especially in Oman's varied workplaces. Practical examples include launching leadership training initiatives that highlight cross-cultural awareness.
- Implementing open and transparent communication channels is essential for navigating the hierarchical structures often found in GCC organizations, allowing employees to feel acknowledged and valued.

#### 3.7.2. Cultural Alignment

- Given the multicultural workforce in Oman, the framework stresses the importance of aligning organizational practices with cultural norms.
- It suggests providing cross-cultural training for managers and employees to improve understanding and collaboration. This can be accomplished through workshops that tackle cultural stereotypes and encourage inclusivity, particularly in sectors such as oil and gas.

#### 3.7.3. Employee Well-Being

- Initiatives aimed at mental health, work-life integration, and ergonomic workspaces are crucial for supporting employee availability, in line with Kahn's framework.
- Creating clear pathways for personal growth and professional development fosters a sense of purpose and long-term dedication.

#### 3.7.4. Recognition and Reward Systems

- Herzberg's motivational elements, like achievement and recognition, are integrated into systematic performance management frameworks.
- Well-defined reward structures connected to individual and team contributions can reduce feelings of inequity between expatriate and local employees.

#### 3.7.5. Learning and Development Opportunities

- Ongoing training and opportunities for career growth cater to employees' internal motivations, enhancing their engagement.
- Customized professional development initiatives connect personal career aspirations with the goals of the organization.

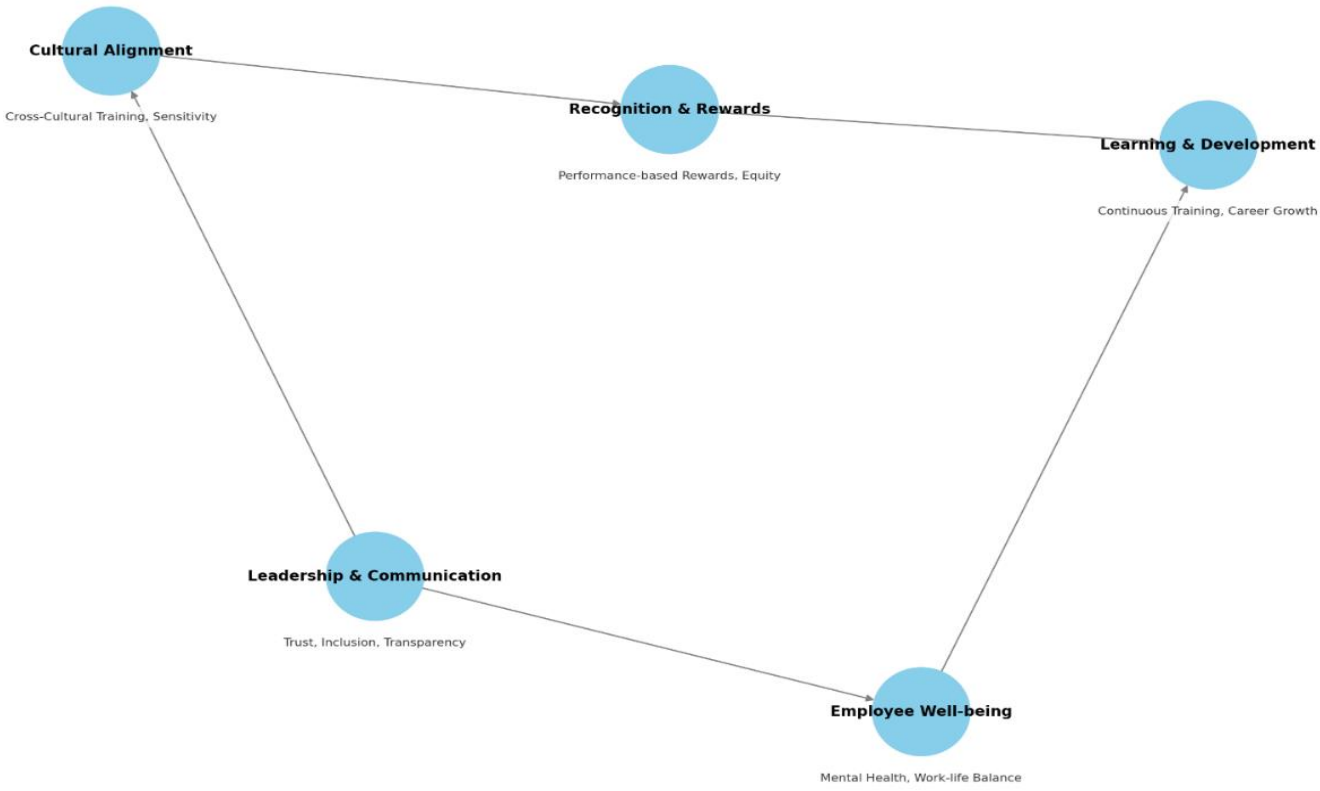



**Figure 1:** Proposed Framework for Employee Engagement in Oman.

### 3.8. Description

This diagram represents the suggested framework aimed at improving employee engagement within multinational corporations (MNCs) in Oman. The framework is composed of five interrelated components:

1. Leadership & Communication: Concentrates on the development of trust, fostering inclusion, and promoting open dialogue to ensure psychological safety in diverse work environments.

2. Cultural Alignment: Highlights the importance of cross-cultural training and awareness to align organizational practices with Oman's multicultural workforce.

3. Employee Well-being: Focuses on initiatives pertaining to mental health, work-life harmony, and physical ergonomics to boost employee availability and productivity.

4. Recognition & Rewards: Emphasizes the need for structured and fair reward systems to recognize both individual and team contributions.

5. Learning & Development: Supports ongoing training and career advancement opportunities to align employees' aspirations with the objectives of the organization.

### 3.9. Connections

The arrows illustrate the dynamic relationships among the components, demonstrating how enhancements in one domain can beneficially impact others. For instance:

- Strong Leadership & Communication bolsters Cultural Alignment and boosts Employee Well-being.
- Recognition & Rewards and Learning & Development collaborate to maintain ongoing employee motivation and engagement.

### 3.10. Application and Relevance

The framework offers actionable recommendations for HR managers, policymakers, and organizational leaders in Oman to boost employee engagement. It is in line with Oman's socio-economic context, which includes a heavy reliance on expatriate labour and a cultural preference for collectivism and hierarchy. By adopting the framework, multinational corporations can anticipate:

- Higher employee retention rates due to increased job satisfaction and trust.
- Improved productivity stemming from engaged and aligned employees.
- A more cohesive organizational culture that unites diverse cultural groups.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The suggested framework for employee engagement in Oman offers a notable addition to the current knowledge base by tackling the specific challenges encountered by multinational corporations (MNCs) functioning in culturally varied settings. This discourse emphasizes both the theoretical and practical repercussions of the framework, placing it within the context of Oman's social, cultural, and organizational environment.

- Key Insights from Data Sources - The results from various studies and reports shape the fundamental elements of the framework:
- Leadership and Communication: Research has pointed out the necessity for inclusive leadership approaches to tackle hierarchical obstacles, especially in Oman's oil and gas sector (Osman & Hammoud, 2017). For instance, leaders within Oman's oil and gas industry might utilize collaborative platforms to promote open communication and transparency.
- Cultural Alignment: Government labour statistics indicate elevated turnover rates among expatriates, highlighting the significance of cultural integration initiatives (Oman Labor Market Report, 2021).
- Employee Well-being: Recent scholarly research highlights that work-life balance is a vital aspect for retaining employees in high-demand sectors (Al Salmi, 2019).

These findings reinforce the framework's emphasis on culturally adaptive engagement methods.

## 5. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The suggested framework is grounded in widely recognized theories of employee engagement, modified to address the distinct cultural and organizational hurdles encountered by multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Oman. This modification offers numerous theoretical perspectives.

### 5.1. Kahn's Engagement Theory

The focus on psychological significance and accessibility in Oman underscores the unique function of organizational support in fostering engagement among expatriates and local employees. This contextual adaptation enhances Kahn's model by incorporating cultural alignment as a vital element in promoting engagement.

### 5.2. Zinger's Pyramid Model

Although Zinger's model centres on comprehensive strategies, its implementation in Oman highlights the relationship between recognition, well-being, and cultural inclusiveness. The proposed framework enriches this by positioning cultural alignment as an essential foundation for collaboration and productivity.

### 5.3. Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

The framework embraces Herzberg's intrinsic motivators, such as career growth and recognition, while emphasizing the local necessity to tackle hygiene factors like fair treatment of expatriate workers. This builds upon Herzberg's model by stressing equity within culturally diverse workplaces.

### 5.4. Aon Hewitt Model

By modifying the principles of "Say, Stay, and Strive" to align with Oman's hierarchical structures, the framework illustrates the significance of open leadership and organized communication, refining the model's relevance in non-Western settings.

This theoretical foundation provides a strong basis for analysing and enhancing employee engagement within culturally diverse and hierarchical environments. The framework's implementation in sectors such as oil and gas and tourism in Oman showcases its direct applicability. For example, specialized leadership development initiatives can tackle hierarchical issues, while customized recognition programs can help alleviate dissatisfaction among expatriates.

## 6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The framework offers practical insights for HR professionals, managers, and decision-makers in Oman.

- Key Elements of the Framework
- 1. Leadership and Communication:
- o Transparent and inclusive leadership approaches help to alleviate the hierarchical issues typically found in GCC economies.
- o Open channels of communication ensure that employees feel appreciated and involved in the decision-making processes of the organization.
- 2. Cultural Alignment:
- o Proposed cross-cultural training initiatives aim to close the gaps between expatriate and local staff, fostering a unified workplace culture.
- o Policies that are culturally sensitive enhance collaboration among teams and minimize conflicts in the workplace.
- 3. Employee Well-being:
- o Programs concentrating on mental health, stress management, and ergonomic practices improve psychological readiness and lessen burnout.
- o Initiatives aimed at supporting work-life balance cater to the challenges posed by high-pressure sectors, such as oil and gas.

### 6.1. Recognition and Rewards

- Organized reward systems recognize both individual and team efforts, addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives.
- Clear reward policies foster trust among employees and eliminate perceptions of favouritism.

### 6.2. Learning and Development

- Ongoing professional development initiatives aligned with the goals of the organization promote long-term employee engagement. Furthermore, mentorship programs that align with personal career goals can boost motivation and retention.
- Customized training programs address the skill requirements of Oman's key industries.

Implementing these actionable strategies guarantees that engagement initiatives are both efficient and enduring, fostering enhanced organizational performance. By showcasing flexibility, the framework aids multinational companies in crafting engagement strategies that coincide with international best practices and local cultural specifics, thereby enhancing its relevance for HR professionals throughout the GCC.

### 6.3. Contextual Relevance

The framework tackles the distinctive workforce characteristics of Oman, which include:

- Expat Workforce: Acknowledging the difficulties presented by short-term contracts and limited avenues for career advancement, the framework offers strategies to assimilate expatriate workers into the company culture.

- Cultural Structures: By promoting inclusive leadership and open lines of communication, the framework addresses the issues created by conventional hierarchical systems.
- Sector-Specific Requirements: Industries such as oil and gas, as well as retail in Oman, gain from engagement practices that are specifically designed to meet their operational needs. For instance, in the retail industry, employee recognition initiatives can be connected to customer satisfaction indicators to foster engagement from frontline staff.

By concentrating on these elements, the framework delivers a culturally attuned approach that can be modified for other GCC economies.

## 7. LIMITATIONS

Although the proposed framework presents a solid conceptual foundation, several limitations need to be recognized:

1. Absence of Empirical Validation: The framework remains theoretical and necessitates empirical examination through surveys, case studies, or interviews with MNCs based in Oman.

2. Generalizability Concerns: Concentrating on Oman may restrict the framework's relevance to other areas with different socio-cultural contexts. Further research could investigate the framework's flexibility in adapting to other GCC nations encountering similar workforce issues.

3. Dependence on Secondary Data: The conclusions stem from a comprehensive literature review, which might not reflect emerging trends or overlooked specifics unique to Oman. Conducting future empirical validation through surveys or case studies would bolster the framework's relevance in practical situations. Additionally, broadening the framework's scope to incorporate case studies from other GCC countries could improve its generalizability and comparative significance, thereby addressing its limitations related to regional focus.

### 7.1. Additional Limitations

Although the study presents a strong conceptual framework, it predominantly depends on secondary data, such as literature and government documents. This reliance restricts the capacity to identify emerging trends or contextual details that could be achieved through primary research techniques like interviews or surveys. Future empirical research is essential to evaluate the framework's relevance and effectiveness in practical settings.

### 7.2. Future Research Directions

To overcome these constraints, subsequent research should:

1. Empirically test the framework through quantitative or qualitative research approaches.
2. Examine its relevance in other GCC nations or areas with comparable workforce characteristics.
3. Assess the lasting effects of the suggested strategies on employee engagement and organizational performance.

Future research could also investigate the interplay of cultural dimensions and organizational hierarchies in shaping engagement strategies, offering insights for wider application across culturally diverse areas.

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