

Finding the Missing Link: The Role of Individual Accountability in Enhancing Employee Engagement for India's Pharmaceutical Sector

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ABSTRACT

The Topic of Employee Engagement is a widely debated on as it is considered to be vital for the success of any organization. My report suggests very low levels of engagement in India. Our study aims to convey how Individual Accountability can improve engagement levels in the Indian Pharma Sector. The objective of our research to showcase the role of Individual Accountability towards improving engagement levels amongst employees. A quantitative survey of 150 pharmaceutical employees was conducted, measuring perceptions of personal accountability and work engagement using a 6 point Likert-scale instruments. Factor Analysis method was used in SPSS to identify the latent conducts of accountability and engagement. The results indicated that two clear factors corresponding to individual accountability and employee engagement, with a significant positive correlation between the two. Employees who reported higher personal accountability also showed substantially higher engagement levels. The alternate hypothesis – that individual accountability significantly enhances employee engagement – was supported, as the accountability factor explained about 40% of the variance in engagement ($p < .001$). This paper concludes with actionable insights for managers to improve employee engagement which will reduce turnover for the organization and improve its performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The word – employee engagement implies that an extent to which employees are willing to go beyond the call of duty and are emotionally invested in their work. This also suggests that such employees are willing to go above and beyond their basic job requirement. According to a research by Kahn in 1990 he defined the engagement as harnessing employees potential towards their job roles which is exhibited in various forms with doing their jobs.

High engagement is not only an indicator of employee well-being but also a driver of organizational outcomes – companies with highly engaged employees consistently report better productivity, customer satisfaction, and retention than those with disengaged workforces.

Accountability can be defined as an person's responsibility / expectation to justify their actions and outcomes. Prior research suggests that accountability is generally associated with positive work behaviors and attitudes – for instance, higher felt accountability has been resulting to better job satisfaction and motivation for employees.



Research Objective

With the intention to find the exact role of accountability and how it helps to enhance the engagement of employees of the particular section which is the part of this study i.e the Pharma Sector.

To address this objective, we formulate a pair of corresponding hypotheses:

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Individual accountability has no significant impact on the employee engagement in India's pharmaceutical sector.
- H_1 (Alternate Hypothesis): Individual accountability significantly enhances employee engagement in India's pharmaceutical sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been a popular topic in organizational behavior for the past few decades, reflecting the extent to which employees are emotionally and cognitively connected to their work and are willing to put discretionary effort into their roles. One of the earliest academic definitions of engagement, by Kahn (1990), described it as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance.” In simpler terms, engaged employees are enthusiastic, focused, and immersed in their work activities. Later definitions converged on describing work engagement as a positive, energized state of mind. For instance, Schaufeli et al. (2002) define work engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.”. Vigor means having high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, dedication means being strongly involved in one’s work and experiencing a sense of significance, pride, and challenge, and absorption is being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in work, such that time passes quickly.

Engagement is often positioned as the positive antithesis of burnout – engaged employees have an energetic and effective connection with their work, unlike burnt-out employees who feel exhausted and cynical. Research has consistently shown that higher engagement is associated with better job performance, higher organizational citizenship behavior, lower absenteeism, and lower turnover (Harter et al., 2002; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Engaged employees create a more positive work environment and can even enhance customer satisfaction and business outcomes, as they go above and beyond basic job requirements.

Pharmaceutical work – whether in research labs or in quality assurance or in sales – demands attention to detail, continuous learning, and often extra effort to meet stringent regulations and deadlines. An engaged scientist is more likely to meticulously follow lab protocols and actively contribute ideas for new product development. An engaged quality control officer will be more vigilant and proactive in catching issues, thus safeguarding product integrity. Conversely, disengaged employees may do the bare minimum, be mentally checked-out, or even look for opportunities to exit (turnover is a known challenge in the industry as competitors often poach talent). Thus, for pharma firms, engagement is not just a “nice-to-have” but a strategic imperative. Engaged teams innovate faster and maintain higher standards, giving the firm an edge in a competitive market.

Engagement levels can be influenced by numerous factors. Prior studies identify drivers such as supportive leadership, opportunities for development, recognition, alignment with company values, and an inclusive culture. Many of these factors tie into the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, a leading theoretical framework in engagement research. The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) posits that engagement flourishes when employees have ample resources (like support, autonomy, feedback, and opportunities) to meet their job demands. Resources can be external (job-provided) or internal/personal. This is where an individual’s psychological states (like optimism, self-efficacy, or psychological ownership) are seen as personal resources that can boost engagement. In essence, an employee’s own mindset and feelings can either bolster or impede how engaged they are, alongside external job conditions.

The concept of employee engagement has been evolving over the past so many years but the crux remain the same – a positive attitude, drive to excel and dedicated to their craft. Employees who are deeply involved in their work and express themselves energetically and passionately in their roles. Prior studies have linked higher engagement to numerous beneficial outcomes, both for individuals and organizations. For instance, engaged employees often showcase certain factors that are helpful to them as the company they are working for (Harter et al., 2002). At the organizational level, engagement has been associated with increased profitability and productivity, as well as reduced turnover rates. These findings underscore why engagement has become a top priority in management – it is not only about employee well-being but also about competitive advantage. However, maintaining high engagement is challenging; factors such as lack of growth opportunities, insufficient recognition, and misalignment with company values can erode engagement over time. In the Indian context, surveys indicate that engagement levels are relatively low and may be declining, prompting a search for new engagement drivers.



Individual Accountability:

Accountability in organizational behavior refers to the justification of one's actions for the outcomes they may derive (Hall, Frink, & Buckley, 2017). It is a psychological state as much as a structural necessity – a person with conviction has a strong sense of accountability and it is perceived that their work is personally important and that they are answerable for their performance. Prior research on accountability shows it has complex effects. On one hand, accountability tends to encourage diligence, ethical behavior, and adherence to standards, as individuals anticipate evaluation of their actions (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Hall and Ferris (2011) argued that a moderate level of accountability can even increase employees' engagement and motivation at work. On the other hand, excessive or punitive accountability could lead to stress or risk-averse behavior, suggesting a balance is needed (Ferris et al., 1995). In general, a culture of personal accountability – where employees willingly “own” their tasks and outcomes – is seen as a hallmark of high-performing teams and can align individual actions with organizational goals. Key elements of accountability include commitment, ownership, resilience, and continuous learning, all of which can contribute to a more engaged and proactive workforce.

Linking Accountability and Engagement. The interplay between individual accountability and employee engagement is intuitively compelling yet under-researched.

Conceptually, the employees who feel accountable for their work, tend to approach roles with greater care and initiative, which are indicators of engagement. Engaged employees, as observed by Gallup, tend to “take accountability for their performance instead of blaming others” when things go awry. If employees know they are responsible for results, they may cognitively and emotionally invest more in their work, leading to higher engagement. Conversely, environments lacking accountability might enable disengagement – Cy Wakeman, a leadership expert, noted that if workers are not held accountable, they may develop a sense of entitlement and put forth minimal effort. In such cases, engagement initiatives fail because employees do not internalize responsibility for improvement. Empirical evidence on this link is emerging. A study by Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) hinted that personal resources (like a sense of responsibility) bolster work engagement. Additionally, Hall et al.'s (2017) review implied that accountability mechanisms can enhance engagement up to an optimal point. In sum, existing literature and business thought leaders converge on the idea that accountability and engagement are synergistic: accountability can drive employees to be more engaged, and engaged employees naturally demonstrate more accountability. This research seeks to build on these insights by directly examining their relationship in the Indian pharma sector.

Let us try to understand the term – Engagement in an Indian context. India's pharmaceutical industry is one of the largest in the world, known for its fast growth and contribution to global healthcare. It is no actually worth mentioning that many areas of the workforce are dependant on this phenomenon – scientists, researchers, sales professionals, and plant workers whose engagement is crucial for innovation, quality, and regulatory compliance.

Given that pharma employees often work in teams and complex projects, instilling a strong sense of personal accountability might lead to better adherence to processes, proactive problem-solving, and more dedication – all reflections of higher engagement. This study, therefore, zeroes in on the pharma sector to explore how enhancing personal accountability might improve employee engagement outcomes, filling a gap in both literature and practice for this industry.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sample: This study employed a quantitative research design. Also, it was done using a survey methodology.

The target population were Indian employees from the pharmaceutical sector. A sample of 150 respondents was obtained from three mid-sized pharmaceutical companies located in Mumbai. Participants were from various functional areas (R&D, production, quality assurance, sales, etc.) and represented a mix of managerial and non-managerial roles. The sample of the survey was 58% of males and 42% of females, with an average age - 34 years. A purposive sampling approach was used, wherein HR departments circulated the survey internally to employees willing to participate. Participation was voluntary and responses were kept confidential. The sample size of ~150 is in line with recommendations for factor analysis (Comrey & Lee, 1992, suggest $N \geq 100$ as “fair”), and provides sufficient power to detect moderate effect sizes in hypothesis testing.

Measures: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two main scales – one measuring individual accountability and the other measuring employee engagement.

A 6 point likert scale was use denoting: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree.

- **Individual Accountability Scale:** This scale consisted of 5 items developed from literature definitions of personal accountability. Sample items included: “I take ownership of the results of my work” and “I am accountable for meeting my job objectives without external prodding.”

These statement capture the very essence of work outcomes and it was observed that the reliability of this scale was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$), indicating good internal consistency.

- **Employee Engagement Scale:** Engagement was measured with 5 items adapted from established engagement



instruments and tailored to the pharma context. Sample statements were: “I am proud to tell great things about working here” and “I feel absorbed in my work going the extra mile” These items reflect the emotional and cognitive investment that characterizes engagement. The engagement scale also showed strong reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$).

Sharing the details of the Engagement Scale used within my own organization. They are abbreviated in the table listed in the Results section:

| Answer Values | Questions | Dimension /Categories | Index Definition |
|---------------|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| 6 Point Scale | I always feel proud to tell others great things about working here | Pride | Engagement Index |
| 6 Point Scale | It's extremely difficult for me to leave this organization | Presence | Engagement Index |
| 6 Point Scale | I do not even think about leaving this organization to work somewhere else | Presence | Engagement Index |
| 6 Point Scale | My organization inspires me to bring my best work every day | Performance | Engagement Index |
| 6 Point Scale | My organization enables me to go the extra mile than normally required to achieve my work | Performance | Engagement Index |

- **Data Collection Procedure:** The survey was administered online using a secure survey platform. Participants received an email link and were brief about this study. To reduce common method bias, respondents were assured anonymity. The data collection was done over a 3-week period in March 2025. Of 180 questionnaires distributed, 157 were returned. After data cleaning to remove incomplete responses, 150 valid responses remained for analysis.
- **Statistical Analysis:** The primary analysis involved exploratory factor analysis (EFA). This was done in order to find out the underlying latent factors of accountability and engagement and to examine the relationship between them. Factor analysis was chosen because it allows simplification of a large set of observed variables into key underlying factors or constructs. This method is well-suited for survey research as it can verify whether the items group together as expected and can reveal the extent of correlation between factors. By using EFA, we aimed to empirically extract the constructs of “individual accountability” and “employee engagement” from our data and assess their interrelationship. This approach aligns with our hypothesis that these constructs, while distinct, are related. In essence, factor analysis helps to isolate constructs and determine if accountability and engagement emerge as separate factors and how strongly they are associated.

The EFA was done using IBM SPSS Statistics. Prior to factor extraction, the dataset was examined for suitability. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.81, indicating meritorious adequacy for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(45) = 612.4$, $p < .001$), rejecting the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix – thus the items had sufficient intercorrelations for factor analysis. We employed principal axis factoring as the extraction method, since our goal was to identify latent constructs rather than merely data reduction. An oblique rotation (Direct Oblimin) was applied to allow factors to correlate, given the theoretical expectation that accountability and engagement may be related.

In addition to factor analysis, we carried out a simple linear regression and correlation analysis to directly test the hypothesis H₁. The average score of the engagement items was used as the dependent variable and the average score of the accountability items as the independent variable. This was done to quantify the impact of accountability on engagement and to assess statistical significance for testing the hypothesis.

4. RESULTS

Factor Analysis Findings: The EFA revealed a two-factor structure underlying the survey items. Two factors had eigenvalues exceeding 1.0, together accounting for 67.4% of the total variance. Table 1 presents the rotated factor loading matrix for the 10 survey items. Factor 1 can be interpreted as Employee Engagement, and Factor 2 as Individual Accountability. All five engagement items loaded strongly on Factor 1 (loadings ranging from 0.82 to 0.88) and had minimal cross-loading on Factor 2. Conversely, the five accountability items loaded highly on Factor 2 (loadings 0.66 to 0.76) with low cross-loadings on Factor 1. This indicates that the questionnaire successfully captured two distinct constructs. The latent factors align with the intended theoretical constructs: one reflecting how engaged employees feel, and the other reflecting their sense of personal accountability.



| Item (Abbreviated) | Factor 1: Engagement | Factor 2: Accountability |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|
| A1. Takes ownership for work outcomes | 0.47 | 0.72 |
| A2. Responsible for achieving goals | 0.48 | 0.66 |
| A3. Holds self accountable for results | 0.52 | 0.68 |
| A4. Owns mistakes and learns from them | 0.47 | 0.71 |
| A5. Proactively addresses duties | 0.44 | 0.76 |
| E1. Enthusiastic about my work | 0.84 | 0.08 |
| E2. Absorbed in my job (flow state) | 0.79 | 0.04 |
| E3. Feels proud to work here | 0.88 | 0.03 |
| E4. Willing to go above and beyond | 0.85 | 0.16 |
| E5. Committed to my organization | 0.87 | 0.09 |

Table 1: 10 Survey Items

All engagement items (E1–E5) exhibit high loadings on the Engagement factor (≥ 0.79) and negligible loadings on Accountability (all < 0.20). Similarly, all accountability items (A1–A5) have strong loadings on the Accountability factor (≥ 0.66) and moderate cross-loadings on Engagement (0.44–0.52). The moderate cross-loadings observed for accountability items suggest that there is some overlap between the constructs – employees who are accountable tend to also be somewhat engaged – which is consistent with an oblique rotation allowing factor correlation. The factor correlation matrix from the EFA showed that the Accountability and Engagement factors had a correlation of $r = 0.58$. This indicates a sizeable positive relationship between the two latent constructs: individuals who scored high on accountability tended to score high on engagement as well. The distinct factor structure combined with their inter-correlation provides evidence supporting our theoretical model that accountability and engagement are related but not identical constructs.

Additional statistics from the factor analysis endorsed robustness of the measurements. The communalities of all items were above 0.5, meaning each item shared at least 50% of its variance with the extracted factors. The eigenvalue for Factor 1 (Engagement) was 4.88, explaining 48.8% of variance, and for Factor 2 (Accountability) was 1.86, explaining 18.6% of variance. No other factor had eigenvalue > 1 , reinforcing the two-factor solution. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the items grouped under each factor was recalculated: it remained 0.88 for the Engagement factor and 0.82 for the Accountability factor, indicating that the items coherently represent their respective constructs.

Hypothesis Testing: This study suggested support towards the Alternate Hypothesis (H_1) and we found that individual accountability significantly enhances employee engagement. With the measurement model confirming two correlated factors, we proceeded to assess the impact quantitatively. A Pearson correlation analysis found a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.63$, $p < .001$) between the individual's accountability score and their engagement score. In other words, employees who rated themselves as more accountable were markedly more engaged at work, and this correlation was statistically significant, rejecting the null hypothesis of no relationship.

The data analysis consistently indicates that H_0 can be rejected. Individual accountability does have a significant and a positive impact on employee engagement among Indian pharmaceutical sector employees. The factor analysis provided evidence that accountability and engagement, while distinct, are positively correlated factors, and the correlation/regression analyses quantified this relationship. These results align with the expected direction of H_1 and lend empirical support to the central premise of this study.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research highlight the importance of individual accountability in the context of India's pharmaceutical sector. Through rigorous analysis, we found that employees who had a strong sense of accountability are considerably more engaged in their work. This section discusses the implications of these results in light of existing literature, the Indian pharma context, and practical considerations for management.

Interpreting the Accountability–Engagement Link: The positive correlation ($r \approx 0.6$) between accountability and engagement observed in our study is in line with conceptual arguments and anecdotal evidence from prior works. Gallup's observations that highly engaged employees "take accountability for their performance" is essentially the mirror image of our finding – our data suggest that those who take accountability (by disposition or environment) become more engaged. This reciprocal relationship reinforces the idea that accountability and engagement fuel each other in a virtuous cycle. When employees own their outcomes, they likely invest more effort and interest in their tasks (becoming engaged), and engaged employees naturally adopt a responsible, proactive approach to work (demonstrating accountability). Our study contributes empirical



evidence to support what many HR professionals have intuitively felt: fostering a culture of accountability can activate higher engagement levels.

The factor analysis results showed that accountability and engagement are related but distinct constructs, which is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that while not all aspects of engagement are about accountability (and vice versa), there is a meaningful overlap. Hall et al. (2017) posited that accountability can motivate employees and potentially increase engagement up to an optimal point, and our results confirm that in the moderate range of accountability present in our sample, the effect is strongly positive, with no evidence of a negative turn (no curvilinear effect was tested, but the linear trend was clearly positive in the observed range). Additionally, the clear bifurcation of items into two factors validates the idea that we are dealing with two constructs; thus, strategies to improve engagement might focus specifically on boosting personal accountability as a component.

Contextualizing in the Indian Pharma Sector: The pharmaceutical industry in India stands to benefit significantly from these insights. This sector often grapples with strict regulatory demands, complex projects, and high stakes for quality – an environment where engaged, accountable employees are invaluable. However, given reports of declining engagement in India (only 19% engaged) and high turnover in some pharma companies, managers are seeking levers to pull to improve the situation. Our findings suggest that emphasizing individual accountability could be a high-impact lever. For example, by clearly defining roles and expectations, giving employees ownership of projects, and recognizing those who follow through on commitments, companies may increase both the sense of accountability and the level of engagement among staff. This aligns with practical frameworks from industry experts who argue that clarity and ownership in one's job lead to higher enthusiasm and discretionary effort (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The results also tie into cultural aspects. India has traditionally been seen as a somewhat collectivist society where hierarchy can be prominent in organizations. In such settings, employees might sometimes defer responsibility upwards. Encouraging individual accountability can empower employees at all levels to take initiative rather than waiting for directions, which can enhance engagement by satisfying intrinsic needs for autonomy and competence. The qualitative feedback from some survey participants (collected as open-ended comments, not analyzed quantitatively here) echoed this sentiment – employees expressed that when they were trusted to be accountable for important tasks, they felt more connected to their work and proud of their contributions. This suggests that the positive effect of accountability on engagement may operate by increasing an employee's sense of ownership and meaningfulness of their work, consistent with Kahn's (1990) notion that psychological meaningfulness drives engagement.

Theoretically, this research aims to bridge a gap in the engagement literature by highlighting individual accountability as a significant correlate of engagement. Many models of engagement focus on job characteristics (like job autonomy, feedback), leadership, or organizational support. Our research points to a more personal attribute or mindset – accountability – as an additional ingredient that can enhance engagement. It invites further theoretical development on how accountability interacts with other known drivers of engagement. For instance, future research could examine if accountability mediates the effect of leadership on engagement (i.e. good leaders instill accountability, which in turn raises engagement) or if accountability moderates engagement outcomes (e.g. engagement leading to performance might depend on how accountable an employee is). We also found empirical support for the argument by Wakeman (2014) that engagement without accountability may not be sustainable. Employees who are kept happy but not held accountable might become complacent – a scenario that organizations should guard against. Thus, a theoretical implication is that accountability might be a necessary condition for true, effective engagement.

Some actionable recommendations include: (1) Set clear expectations and goals – when employees know exactly what they are responsible for, they are more likely to assume ownership. (2) Empower decision-making – allowing employees the autonomy to make decisions in their realm can reinforce that they are accountable for outcomes, thereby increasing their engagement through a greater sense of control and trust. (3) Provide feedback and hold people to their commitments – regular, constructive feedback signals to employees that their work is visible and that they are answerable for their results, which can encourage them to stay actively engaged. (4) Recognize accountable behavior – when employees step up and take responsibility, acknowledging and rewarding this can reinforce the positive cycle of accountability leading to engagement. These practices echo insights from organizational development literature that real engagement requires accountability at all levels.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It is our understanding that some employees might overstate positive attributes (engagement, accountability) due to wanting to appear as good performers. We attempted to mitigate this through anonymity and encouraging honesty, and the factor analysis did not indicate a single factor dominance (which is a good sign), but the limitation remains. Future studies could include supervisor or peer evaluations of an employee's accountability and engagement, or use objective measures (like performance data or attendance) as proxies for engagement, to complement self-reports. Second, the cross-sectional design limits our ability to draw causal conclusions. We found accountability and engagement to be correlated, but we cannot conclusively say that accountability causes higher engagement (it could be that engaged employees subsequently develop a stronger sense of accountability, or a bidirectional influence is at play). Longitudinal research or experiments (e.g., an



intervention that increases accountability and then measures subsequent engagement changes) would be valuable to establish causality. Third, our sample, while focused and relevant, is relatively modest in size and limited to a few companies in one country and industry. Thus, generalizability is an open question. The patterns might differ in other sectors or cultural contexts. For example, in extremely high-pressure industries, too much accountability might quickly turn into stress, potentially dampening engagement – a possibility suggested by some accountability researchers (Hall et al., 2017). Exploring the accountability-engagement relationship in different contexts (IT industry, Western countries, public sector vs. private, etc.) would enrich understanding. Finally, our study looked at individual accountability in isolation; future work could examine how it interacts with other factors like team accountability, leadership accountability (e.g., leaders being accountable to employees), trust, and organizational justice in influencing engagement.

7. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate whether individual accountability plays a role in enhancing employee engagement with a clear focus on one of the rising sectors of the nation i.e. the Pharma Sector. It was observed in our study that employees who are engagement deliver better at work. Also, the Null Hypothesis (H0) that was proposed was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted that implies that accountability and engagement are related hence go hand in hand. It was also suggested that a large portion of the variance was accounted to accountability while measuring the levels of engagement.

These findings contribute to both theory and practice. For scholars, this research highlights an important psychological factor – accountability – that merits inclusion in models of work engagement. It shows that engagement is not just a function of what the organization does for employees, but also how employees personally approach their work responsibilities. For practitioners and industry leaders, especially in the pharma sector, the message is clear: cultivating a culture of accountability may be a powerful strategy to boost engagement. When organizations encourage and empower each individual to be answerable for their tasks and results, employees respond by investing more of themselves in the work, which is the essence of engagement.

The “missing link” of individual accountability appears to be a key piece in the puzzle of driving higher employee engagement in India’s pharmaceutical industry.

What needs to be done by industry practioners is that, we need to reinstate personal accountability in organisation. This can be done by a 4 simple steps loop of:

1. Setting Clear Expectations
2. Providing Autonomy
3. Giving Feedback
4. Supporting with Recognition.

This way the company can energize the employees of the organization and this way - employees find greater meaning and involvement in their work, and organizations benefit from the heightened performance and dedication of an engaged workforce.

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