

The Meaning of Employee Engagement in The Perspective of Employees: An Explorationo The Role of Emotional Intelligence, Employee Well-Being, and Rewards at PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung

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Abstract—This study aims to explore the meaning of employee engagement from an employee perspective and understand how the role of emotional intelligence, employee well-being programs, and rewards contribute to employee attachment in the work environment of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung. A qualitative approach with phenomenological study methods is used to explore the subjective experiences of employees in their daily lives. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of purposively selected informants from various work units. The results of the study show that employee engagement is not only interpreted as involvement in work, but also as a form of strong emotional connection to the organization. Emotional intelligence plays an important role in helping employees manage work pressure, maintain effective communication, and strengthen a sense of belonging. Meanwhile, employee well-being programs, which include psychological support, health, and work-life balance, create working conditions that support attachment. Rewards, both financial and non-financial, are seen as a form of recognition that motivates and fosters loyalty. This study concludes that employee attachment is formed through the interaction between the emotional aspects, well-being, and appreciation received in the workplace. The implications of this study show the need for a more holistic and human-centered management approach to build sustainable engagement in organizations.

Keywords: *Employee engagement, emotional intelligence, employee well-being, reward*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Problem

In an era of disruption and uncertainty in the world of work, employee *engagement* is one of the strategic issues that receives attention in human resource management. Employee engagement is not just physical engagement at work, but reflects an employee's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connection to the organization, its values, and goals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2020). Organizations with high employee engagement rates tend

to exhibit better productivity, higher retention rates, and a collaborative and innovative work environment.

One of the main determinants of employee attachment is emotional intelligence, which is the ability of individuals to recognize, understand, and manage the emotions of themselves and others (Goleman, 2018). In a complex work environment such as PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung, the emotional intelligence of employees is very decisive in building healthy social interactions, effective communication, and empathetic decision-making. Employees who are able to manage work pressure emotionally are more likely to develop commitment and attachment to their work.

In addition to emotional factors, the company's attention to employee well-being also plays an important role. Employee well-being includes not only physical, but also psychological and social aspects. Work-life *balance* programs, a supportive work environment, and access to mental support are part of the company's efforts to create humane and motivating working conditions (Rahayu, 2024). Research shows that employees who feel "cared for" by their organization have stronger emotional attachment and long-term loyalty (Barinua & BarangoTariah, 2024).

On the other hand, rewards as a form of appreciation for employee contributions also affect attachment. Fair and meaningful rewards—both in financial and non-financial form—reinforce a sense of belonging and importance within the organization. In a qualitative context, rewards are not only viewed from the nominal level, but from their symbolic meaning of justice, recognition, and self-achievement (Sri Rahayu, 2024).

However, the meaning of employee engagement is often subjective and contextual. Therefore, this research was conducted to explore in depth how employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung interprets employee engagement, as well as the role of emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and rewards in forming these attachments. The qualitative approach was chosen



to capture experiences, perceptions, and meanings that cannot be reached by a quantitative approach alone.

In a modern work environment full of pressure and change, employee *engagement* has become one of the key factors in maintaining organizational productivity and sustainability. Employees who have high attachment generally show loyalty, work ethic, and a willingness to contribute more than standard expectations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2020). However, building engagement is not a simple thing, as attachment is the result of a complex combination of emotional, psychological, and social factors.

One of the important factors that affect engagement is emotional intelligence. Employees who have the ability to recognize and manage their emotions and understand the emotions of others tend to adjust more easily in the work environment, maintain interpersonal relationships, and survive stressful situations (Goleman, 2018). In the context of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung, which operates in the public service sector with high work demands, emotional intelligence is key in forming a balance between work demands and individual responses.

In addition to emotional intelligence, employee well-being also plays a strategic role. Companies that pay attention to the well-being of employees—whether physically, mentally, or socially—will create a work environment that supports psychological health and boosts morale. Welfare programs such as counseling, *work-life balance*, and a friendly work environment will have a positive impact on employee attachment (Rahayu, 2024).

However, attention to welfare alone is not enough. Rewards or rewards for performance are also important aspects that contribute to attachment. Rewards are not just a material or financial issue, but also a symbolic form of recognition that shows that employees' efforts and contributions are appreciated. Fair and transparent rewards will strengthen the sense of belonging to the organization and encourage long-term loyalty (Sri Rahayu, 2024).

In practice, there has not been much research that has explored in depth how employees interpret employee *engagement* in relation to these aspects qualitatively. Most previous studies have been conducted through quantitative approaches, which often fail to capture the nuances of employee experiences and perceptions in their entirety.

Therefore, this research is important to explore the subjective perceptions and experiences of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung regarding the meaning of employee engagement, as well as the role of emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and rewards in forming these attachments. Through a qualitative approach, it is hoped that a deep understanding can be obtained that can be the basis for formulating a human resource management policy that is more responsive, holistic, and based on the reality of employee work.

B. Problem Formulation

Based on the background that has been described, the formulation of the problem in this study is:

- 1) *What is the meaning of employee engagement in the perspective of employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung?*

What is the role of emotional intelligence in shaping employee work attachment?

How does employee well-being programs contribute to employee engagement in organizations?

How do rewards or rewards affect employee morale and loyalty?

How is the interaction between emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and rewards in shaping employee engagement?

C. Research Objectives

This research aims to:

- *Exploring the meaning of employee engagement based on the experiences and perceptions of employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung.*
- *Explain the role of emotional intelligence in employee work attachment.*
- *Describe the contribution of the employee well-being program to employee morale.*
- *Analyze the impact of rewards on motivation and work engagement.*
- *Identify the relationship between emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and rewards in shaping employee engagement.*

D. Qualitative Interview Guidelines Instrument

Here is an example of interview guidelines that can be used in data collection:

1) Part I: General Respondent Data

Initial Name:

Gender:

Age:

Job Title/Position:

Long working at PT. PLN ULP Tarutung:

2) Part II: Substantial Questions

a) Meaning of Employee Engagement

- What do you understand about employee engagement?
- What makes you feel tied or unattached to work?

b) Emotional Intelligence

- How do you usually manage emotions in stressful work situations?
- To what extent does the ability to understand the emotions of colleagues affect your work morale?

c) Employee Well-Being

- What do you think about the employee welfare program provided by the company?
- Does the program affect your comfort and work morale?

d) Reward

- What form of reward or appreciation have you received from the company?
- How much does the award affect motivation and loyalty to the company?

e) *Factor Synergy*

- Do you think there is a connection between emotions, well-being, and appreciation and work ethic?
- What advice do you have for companies to increase employee engagement?

a)
b)
c)
d)
e)

Leadership: A good leadership style can motivate and empower employees, thus improving overall performance.

Compensation: Fair and competitive compensation can improve employee motivation and performance.

3) *Employee Performance Indicators*

Based on Wibowo (2022), performance indicators include:

- Quality of work; Degree of rigor and accuracy of work*
- Quantity of work; volume of work completed*
- Punctuality; speed in completing tasks*
- Responsibility; commitment to the implementation of the task*
- Work initiatives; Self-Directed Efforts to Solve Problems*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Employee Performance

1) *Employee Performance Discussion*

Employee performance is the result of work achieved by individuals in accordance with the standards and goals set by the organization. According to Wibowo (2022), performance is "the result of work achieved by individuals or groups in an organization, in accordance with their respective authority and responsibilities, in an effort to realize the organization's goals legally and not unlawfully."

Employee performance is the level of achievement of the employee's work in carrying out the tasks for which he is responsible, which reflects his contribution to the organization's goals" (Rahayu, 2018).

2) *Factors Affecting Employee Performance*

According to Wibowo (2022), there are several main factors that affect employee performance, including:

Abilities and Expertise: An employee's abilities and expertise are the foundation of good performance. Employees who have competencies that are in accordance with their work will find it easier to achieve optimal performance.

Motivation: Employee work motivation, both internal and external, greatly affects performance. External factors such as employee well-being, rewards, and a conducive work environment can increase motivation.

Work Environment: A comfortable and safe work environment creates a conducive atmosphere, which can ultimately improve employee performance, while an uncomfortable environment can decrease productivity.

HR personality/quality: Employee personality can also affect performance. Some personality types may be better suited to certain types of work, so they can have a positive impact on performance.

Commitment: An employee's commitment to work and the company also plays an important role in performance. Committed employees tend to be more responsible and dedicated to their work.

Organizational Culture: A positive organizational culture can create a supportive and motivating work environment for employees, which in turn can improve performance.

B. Employee Engagement

An employment agreement or employment agreement is a formal agreement between an employer and an employee that contains the terms of employment, rights and obligations of both parties, as well as legal provisions that are binding during the employment relationship. According to Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, a labor agreement is an agreement between a worker/laborer and an employer or employer that contains the terms of work, rights, and obligations of the parties.

An employment agreement is a formal contract between an employer and an employee that outlines the terms and conditions of employment, including job responsibilities, compensation, work hours, benefits, and termination procedures. and termination procedures (Dessler, 2020)).

The following are some of the factors that affect the Employment Agreement according to (Dessler, 2020), namely;

- 1) *Company Policy* Each company has different internal rules regarding work standards, benefits, and employment procedures that will be included in the employment agreement.
- 2) *Labor Laws and Regulations* Labor law in a country is the legal basis for drafting the content of employment agreements, including the rights and obligations of workers and employers.
- 3) *Nature of the Job* The complexity, risks, and responsibilities of the job affect the content of the agreement, especially regarding compensation, working hours, and termination provisions.
- 4) *Bargaining Power* The bargaining power between employers and workers also affects the content of agreements, especially in companies with trade unions.
- 5) *Labor Market Conditions* The availability of labor, the unemployment rate, and the demand for certain skills can affect the content and flexibility of the employment agreement.

The following are the indicators of Employment Agreement according to Dessler (2020) based on the book *Human Resource Management (16th Edition)* that can be used in quantitative research:

- 1) *Job Description*, Explain the responsibilities, key duties, and roles that employees must perform.
- 2) *Compensation and Benefits*, Detail the base salary, bonuses, incentives, and other perks received.
- 3) *Work Schedule*, Manage working hours, rest time, overtime, and flexibility of working hours.

- 4) *Duration and Termination, Explain the duration of the contract, the terms of the extension, and the terms of termination*
- 5) *Confidentiality and Conduct, Contains rules about data confidentiality, work behavior, and certain prohibitions.*

C. Employee Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an individual's ability to be aware, understand, manage, and direct one's own and others' emotions, which plays a major role in building healthy working relationships and improving performance. According to Goleman (2021): *"Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize our own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves, and to manage emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."* (Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize oneself and others' feelings, motivate oneself, and manage emotions well in oneself and relationships)

The following are the factors that affect Emotional Intelligence according to Goleman (2021) and other current sources:

- 1) *Self-Awareness; The ability to recognize and understand one's own moods, emotions, and drives.*
- 2) *self-regulation; Ability to manage or control intrusive emotions and negative impulses.*
- 3) *Self-Motivation; An internal drive to achieve a goal, beyond external motivations such as financial rewards.*
- 4) *empathy; The ability to understand the emotions and perspectives of others, especially in the context of teamwork or service.*
- 5) *Social Skills; Ability to build relationships, influence others, and work together effectively.*

The following are indicators of emotional intelligence according to Goleman (2021), which are divided into five main dimensions:

- 1) *Self-Awareness*
 - a) *Being aware of the emotions you are feeling*
 - b) *Recognizing the influence of emotions on thoughts and behavior*
 - c) *Have realistic confidence*
- 2) *Self-Regulation (Pengendalian Diri)*
 - a) *Able to control negative impulses or emotions*
 - b) *Stay calm under pressure*
 - c) *Be open to change and innovation*
- 3) *Motivation (Motivasi Diri)*
 - a) *Have a commitment to the organization's goals*
 - b) *Achievement-oriented*
 - c) *Demonstrate initiative and high work ethic*
 - d) *Empathy*
 - e) *Able to understand the feelings and needs of others*
 - f) *Sensitive to social and cultural dynamics*
 - g) *Responsive to other people's problems*
- 4) *Social Skills (Keterampilan Sosial)*
 - a) *Able to build and maintain good working relationships*
 - b) *Effective in communicating and negotiating*

- c) *Work together in a team and influence others positively*

D. Employee WellBeing

The following is the definition of Employee WellBeing according to Barinua & BarangoTariah (2024) based on the results of their theoretical literature: "Employee wellbeing" includes three main dimensions: physical, psychological, and social, which include job satisfaction, positive and negative emotional experiences, and stable social interactions in the workplace. All three together affect employee work performance directly.

Based on Barinua & BarangoTariah (2024), the factors that affect employee well-being include the following aspects:

Work Environment

Safety and comfort of the working environment

Availability of adequate work facilities

Workload and workload

Work-Life Balance

Flexibility of working time

An opportunity to rest and take a break

Support for personal/family needs

Leadership and Managerial Style

Emotional support from superiors

Communicative and participatory leadership

Recognition and appreciation for employee contributions

Social Relations in the Workplace

Harmonious interaction with colleagues

Inclusive and collaborative work culture

Lack of interpersonal conflict

Compensation and Financial Security

Fair and competitive salary

Health and welfare benefits

Pension or social security programs

Development and Career

Learning and training opportunities

A clear and fair career path

Meaningful work challenges

The following are the indicators of Employee Well-Being according to Barinua & BarangoTariah (2024), grouped by key dimensions:

1) Physical Well-Being:

- a) *Levels of physical fatigue at work*
- b) *Maintained body health during work*
- c) *Availability of health support facilities in the workplace*

2) Psychological Well-Being:

- a) *Job satisfaction*
- b) *Stress levels or work pressure*
- c) *Feeling happy and comfortable at work*

3) Social Well-Being:

- a) *Good relationships with colleagues and superiors*
- b) *A sense of social acceptance and support*
- c) *Harmonious cooperation and communication*

4) Work-Life Balance:

- a) *Ability to divide time between work and personal life*

- b) *Company support for personal/family needs*
- c) *Flexibility of working time*

E. Reward

According to Wibowo (2022), rewards include financial and non-financial compensation given to reward employee achievements. Rewards have motivational and retention functions.

The factors that affect Reward according to Wibowo (2022) are:

- 1) *Financial incentives: Base salary, bonuses, benefits, and other compensation supplements.*
- 2) *Non-financial incentives: Recognition, appreciation, promotion, conducive work environment, and social rewards.*

Reward Indicators according to Wibowo (2022)

Wibowo divides rewards into two main types, namely financial rewards and non-financial rewards, with the following indicators:

1) Financial Rewards

- a) *Basic Salary – The fixed wage received by the employee according to the employment agreement.*
- b) *Allowance – Additional beyond basic salary (transportation, meals, position).*
- c) *Bonus – Incentives based on work or performance.*
- d) *Commission – Rewards for achieving certain targets or contributions.*
- e) *Other incentives – Additional forms of compensation such as overtime.*

3) Non-Financial Rewards

- a) *Recognition – Praise or appreciation for performance from superiors.*
- b) *Promotion Opportunities – Opportunities to move up in a position or role.*
- c) *Giving More Responsibility – Trust in competence.*
- d) *Comfortable Work Environment – A supportive work atmosphere.*
- e) *Competency Enhancement – Opportunities to participate in training or self-development.*

F. Relationships Between Variables

In this study, there are several variables that are interrelated, namely emotional intelligence, employee well-being, awards, 1) employee performance, and employee engagement. The 2) explanation of the relationship between the variables is as 3) follows:

1) Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance

Previous research has shown that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on employee performance. Employees with high emotional intelligence are able to manage stress, communicate effectively, and adapt to change, all of which contribute to improved performance.

2) Employee Well-Being and Employee Performance

Good employee well-being is directly related to productivity and performance levels. Employees who feel satisfied with their

physical and mental well-being will be more motivated to work well.

3) Employee Rewards and Performance

Awards or rewards play an important role in increasing employee motivation and performance. Rewards provided by companies can increase their sense of appreciation and strengthen employee commitment to the company.

4) Employee Engagement as a Mediator

Employee engagement functions as a mediator between emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and reward for performance. Employees who are emotionally engaged in their work will be more likely to show better performance.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Approaches and Types of Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with the phenomenological study method, which is an approach that aims to understand the meaning of individual subjective experience of a phenomenon, in this case employee engagement experienced by employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung. The phenomenological approach is used to explore deep perceptions of the role of emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and reward for work attachment.

B. Research Location and Time

The research was conducted at PT. PLN (Persero) Customer Service Unit (ULP) Tarutung, North Sumatra. The research period lasted from May–July 2025, covering the stages of data collection, transcription, analysis, and drawing conclusions.

C. Research Subject

The subjects in this study are employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung, which was selected by purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Have at least 3 years of work experience,*
- Have participated in employee well-being programs or received company rewards,*
- Willing and able to express their experiences openly.*
- The number of informants is adjusted to the principle of data saturation, estimated to be between 6–10 people.*

D. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques are carried out through:

- In-depth interviews with semi-structured guides,*
- Participatory observation, whenever possible,*
- Documentation related to reward policies, welfare programs, and internal company reports.*

E. Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself. In addition, pre-prepared interview guidelines are used, containing exploratory open-ended questions according to the focus of the research.

F. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study used the Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) model, which includes:

- 1) *Data reduction: sorting, selecting, and summarizing relevant interview results.*
- 2) *Data presentation: compiling data in the form of narratives and thematic matrices.*
- 3) *Conclusion drawn/verification: interpreting meaning and drawing conclusions based on findings and relationships between themes.*

G. Data Validity Test

To guarantee the validity of the data, techniques are used:

- 1) *Triangulation of sources and methods,*
- 2) *Member check (reconfirm to the informant),*
- 3) *Prolonged engagement (intensive involvement of researchers in the field),*
- 4) *Trail audit (systematic record of the research process).*

IV. RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

This research succeeded in exploring the experiences and perceptions of employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung regarding the meaning of employee engagement, as well as how the role of emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and rewards contribute to this attachment. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with seven key informants, several main themes were obtained as follows:

A. The Meaning of Employee Engagement in the Employee's View

Most informants interpret work attachment as a sense of belonging to the company, characterized by enthusiasm, loyalty, and high responsibility for work. An informant stated:

"I feel like this job is not just a job, but a part of my life. If there is a power outage, I am also worried because it concerns our good name." (Informant 3)

These findings are consistent with the view of Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) who stated that employee engagement includes dedication, vigor, and absorption (deep involvement in work).

B. The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Performance and Attachment

Informants admit that the ability to manage emotions, both personally and between colleagues, contributes greatly to maintaining harmony and productivity. Especially in customer complaint service situations, emotional intelligence is the main tool for maintaining emotional stability and professionalism.

"Sometimes customers get angry, but if we get carried away with emotions too, the problem gets more complicated. I learned to calm down before responding." (Informant 1)

These findings support Goleman's (1998) theory that emotional intelligence is one of the important indicators in building healthy and productive working relationships.

C. The Impact of the Employee Well-Being Program on Morale

Most of the informants felt that the welfare programs offered by PLN, such as health insurance, spiritual training, and weekly

exercise, provided a sense of comfort and psychological security. This has a positive impact on their enthusiasm and engagement.

"We are given time to exercise every Friday, it feels refreshing and we are better prepared to work." (Informant 5)

Good employee well-being contributes to lowering work stress levels and improving the quality of work life, as revealed by Barinua & Barango-Tariah (2024).

D. Rewards as a Motivation and Loyalty Booster

Rewards in the form of performance bonuses, annual awards, and training opportunities are seen as a form of recognition and appreciation for contributions. Although not all informants receive rewards directly, they admit that the reward system increases motivation and pride as part of PLN.

"If we see colleagues who get rewards for their performance, we are encouraged to work better." (Informant 6)

These findings support Vroom's (1964) theory that rewards increase expectations and the desire to perform better.

E. Synergy of the Three Factors to Engagement

The results of the interviews show that emotional intelligence, employee well-being, and rewards complement each other in shaping employee engagement. Employees feel more engaged when companies support mental health, provide rewards, and foster a work environment that supports positive emotions.

"If all those factors work, I feel more appreciated, more motivated, and more sincere in my work." (Informant 7)

This synergy illustrates the integration between personal (emotional), organizational (well-being), and structural (reward) aspects that form an overall involvement.

F. General Discussion

Overall, the results of the study show that employee engagement is not only about work morale, but also about the psychological and emotional bond between employees and the company. This is formed by the ability of employees to manage emotions, the company's attention to welfare, and the provision of fair and motivating rewards.

This research is in line with Deci & Ryan's (2000) study on self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of supporting autonomy, competence, and connectedness to improve motivation and work engagement.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that employee engagement in the perspective of employees of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung is interpreted deeply as a form of emotional commitment, sense of belonging, and sincere psychological involvement to the company. Employees are not only oriented to formal tasks, but rather to become a job as part of their personal identity and dedication.

Three main factors explored make a significant contribution to work attachment:

Emotional intelligence plays an important role in creating job stability and stress management, especially in the context of public services that demand high self-control.

The company's employee well-being program is considered to provide work comfort that encourages increased enthusiasm, loyalty, and a better work-life balance.

Rewards, both financial and non-financial, are seen as a form of recognition that strengthens motivation, provides psychological satisfaction, and triggers long-term engagement.

VI. SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of the research, the authors provide the following suggestions:

For the management of PT. PLN (Persero) ULP Tarutung:

It is recommended to strengthen emotional intelligence training, especially for employees in the customer service line.

Improve the quality of employee well-being programs, such as psychological counseling, sports activities, and work-life balance training.

Review and develop a more transparent and fair reward system, in order to reach more outstanding employees.

For HRD Practitioners and Similar Organizations:

It is important to view work attachment not only as a result of the management system, but also from the emotional and social experiences of employees in the workplace.

For future researchers:

It is recommended to develop this study quantitatively to measure the strength of the relationship between variables statistically, or to use a longitudinal approach to look at the dynamics of engagement in the long term.

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