

A Theoretical Model of The Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement: Dubin's Method

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Abstract

The quality of an organization's human resources is perhaps the leading indicator of its growth and sustainability. The attainment of a workplace with high-caliber employees starts with the selection of the right people for the right jobs. This paper proposes a theoretical model of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (EE) using Dubin's theory-building methodology. This paper has identified the work environment, perceived organizational support, supervisor support, rewards, recognition, and core self-evaluations as the major antecedents of EE. This paper further proposes job demands and resources as moderators of employee engagement. Hence, the purpose of the study is to propose a theoretical model of antecedents and consequences of engagement by incorporating the link between the antecedents(work environment, perceived organizational support, supervisor support, rewards, recognition, core-self evaluations), outcomes (employee performance and organizational citizenship behavior) and moderators(job demands and job resources) of employee engagement.

Keywords: antecedents, consequences, Dubin's method, employee engagement, theoretical model

Introduction

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is a burgeoning topic that has been gaining momentum in recent years. Since the emergence of the topic in the past 2.5 decades there have been different variations in its definition, validity of the concept, antecedents and consequences, and its measurement. Such powerful interest is driven by the notion that organizations looking to leverage employee engagement could ultimately observe significant bottom-line results (Macey & Schneider, 2008). For instance, the notion of engagement has been claimed to predict both individual employee outcomes and organizational level success and financial performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Rich, Lepine, and Crawford, 2010; Shuck & Reio, 2011; Anitha,2014).

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Research Methodology

Despite the monumental interest the term engagement has been receiving from academicians and practitioners alike there has been a dearth of literature that links the antecedents, moderators, and consequences of employee engagement. This paper builds on existing research and empirical studies on the topic using the first part of Robert Dubin's (1978) two-part, eight-step theory-building methodology and proposes a theoretical model that includes the major antecedents, moderators, and consequences of employee engagement. *Theory-building* methodology was chosen because it is the ongoing process of producing, confirming, applying, and adapting theory (Lynham, 2000). Theory building can be described as "the purposeful process or recurring cycle by which coherent descriptions, explanations, and representations of observed or experienced phenomena are generated, verified, and refined" (Lynham, 2000). Good theory building should result in two kinds of knowledge: outcome knowledge, usually in the form of explanative and predictive knowledge, and process knowledge, for example, in the form of an increased understanding of how something works and what it means (Dubin, 1976).

According to Heinen (1985), there are two kinds of theories namely a *concatenated* theory (i.e., inductive-synthesis) and *hierarchical* theory (i.e., hypothetico-deductive). This paper has adopted the hypothetico-deductive approach for theory building. Dubin's (1978) two-part, eight-step theory-building approach has been considered for the study. Dubin's (1978) method comprises two parts theoretical and research operation part. According to Dubin (1978), the "successful completion of the first part results in a conceptual framework of the theory whereas the second part results in an empirically verified and trustworthy theory". Hence, this paper builds on existing research and empirical studies on the topic that are related to employee engagement. This paper will use the five steps of Dubin's (1978) namely (1) units (or concepts) of the theory, (2) laws of interaction among the units, (3) boundaries of the theory, (4) system states of the theory and (5) propositions of the theory.

Applying the first five phases of Dubin's method, this paper identifies (1) workplace environment (2) supervisor support (3) perceived organizational support (4) rewards and recognition, and (5) core-self evaluation as the major antecedents to employee engagement. We also propose that (5) demographic characteristics (6) job demands and resources as important moderators to the relationships between the antecedents and employee engagement. In turn, the outcomes derived from the study are (7) employee performance and (8) organizational citizenship behaviors. Taking into account the above-mentioned factors, a number of propositions have been arrived at for further empirical testing.

Step 1: Units of a Theoretical Model of Employee Engagement

The units of a theory refer to the concepts, basic ideas, or building blocks that make up the theory (Dubin, 1978). The units are the "things out of which the theory is built" (Dubin, 1976) or the raw conceptual framework upon which the theory is based (Lynham, 2002). To identify the units to be included in the model an integrative literature review was conducted. Given the many number of studies that explore the relationship between the constituents and engagement, a number of significant antecedents that predict engagement have been identified for the study. The identified antecedents

are (1) workplace environment (2) supervisor support (3) perceived organizational support (4) rewards and recognition and (5) core-self evaluation as the major antecedents to employee engagement. We also propose that job demands and resources as important moderators of the relationships between the antecedents and employee engagement. In turn, the outcomes derived from the study are employee performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Taking into account the above-mentioned factors, a number of propositions have been arrived at for further empirical testing.

Literature review

A) Employee engagement

Employee engagement has become a topic of immense interest in the organizational literature in recent years. Almost twenty-six years ago, ethnographic researcher W.A. Kahn (1990) first conceptualized engagement as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles”. Kahn can be considered an academic parent of the employee engagement movement, as his work has been influential, yet he does not use that term specifically and his qualitative research is concerned with personal engagement (Welch, 2011). In his work, Kahn (1990) operationalized engagement as a three-dimensional construct consisting of *cognitive*, *emotional*, and *physical* properties (Rich et al., 2010; Shuck & Reio, 2011). He argued that three psychological engagement conditions are necessary for an employee to bring themselves into their work role performance. These determinants are meaningfulness (work elements), safety (social elements, including management style, process, and organisational norms), and availability (individual distractions). In addition, May et al. (2004) empirically tested Kahn’s (1990) qualitative model and posited that the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability are positively related to engagement. The engagement has been defined completely as when employees feel positive emotions towards their work, find their work to be personally meaningful, and have hope for the future of their work. By 1999, it was the beginning of the practitioner interest and the term employee engagement came into use by the Gallup researchers (Harter et al., 2002). Gallup’s Buckingham and Coffman (1999) introduced the term in their business book claiming that engaged employees drive customer loyalty and that: “The right people in the right roles with the right managers drive employee engagement”. Gallup researchers came up with the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) (Harter et al., 2002) and the Q12 employee engagement questionnaire (Harter et al., 2003; Harter and Schmidt, 2008) and propounded that an employee can be called engaged if he could say ‘yes’ to all the questions in GWA/Q12. In addition, they identified three types of people: engaged employees, not engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees in the workplace. Engaged employees strive to excel in their roles. Not engaged employees just do what they are told whereas actively disengaged employees are the dangerous ones as they are a bad influence on the other employees.

Next, there was a surge of research that focused on how engagement can be harnessed within the context of the Job–Demands–Resources model (JD-R; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The JD-R model explores the interaction between the demands of a job, the availability of resources to complete that job, and the resulting state of engagement. They defined job engagement as: “a positive, fulfilling,

work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption". Institute for Employment studies (Robinson, Perryman and Hayday,2004;2007) used data from IES' 2003 attitude survey of over 10,000 employees in 14 organisations in the NHS and developed four emotional drivers of engagement namely: involvement in decision-making, opportunities available for decision making, the extent to which employees feel able to voice their views. A key scientific development in this wave was the emergence of the positive psychology movement which switched focus from negative consequences of attitudes to work like job burnout, to positive drivers like engagement (Welch,2011).Saks(2006) is the first person from the academic literature who can be credited for distinguishing between job and organization engagement and went on to propound the antecedents and consequences of engagement. According to Saks(2006), the antecedents of employee engagement were job characteristics, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice, and distributive justice. On the other hand, the consequences of engagement were job satisfaction, organisational commitment, intention to quit, and organisational citizenship behaviour. It is claimed that engagement can predict employee outcomes, success, negative turnover intentions, and the financial performance of organizations (Saks, 2006). Similarly, research has explored how employee engagement is related to turnover intention, task performance, knowledge creation, and organizational citizenship behavior (Rich et al., 2010; Shuck & Reio 2011), as well as job climate, affective commitment, and proactive personality traits (Macey & Schneider, 2008). These researchers have indicated the impact engagement has on bottom-line outcomes and further emphasised the importance of engagement in the workplace.

B) Work Environment

Macey et al. (2009, p. 9) define employee engagement as: *"the individual's sense of purpose and focused energy, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort and persistence towards organizational goals."*

Macey et al. (2009) formulated this definition based on the work of Macey and Schneider (2008), their conceptual framework for understanding employee engagement includes: (1) trait engagement, e.g. conscientiousness, trait positive affect, proactive personality; (2) state engagement, e.g. satisfaction, involvement, empowerment; and (3) behavioural engagement, e.g. extra-role behaviour, proactivity, and role expansion. These are three important elements, because whilst employees might feel "engaged" in their work, they may nevertheless not contribute to organizational success, because their "engagement" and energy are not properly focused (Schaufeli, 2013). The reasons are that first, they may not have personal qualities, such as proactivity, optimism, and adaptability (trait and behavioural engagement), associated with a protean career (Waters et al., 2014); second, there may be insufficient empowerment (state engagement) to generate sufficient positive energy and innovative capacity to positively influence the behaviour; and third, the organisation may not have clarified the behaviours (behavioural engagement) associated with high performance that contribute to organisational goals.

Trait engagement, state engagement, and behavioural engagement have their roots in the work environment, where a supportive and collaborative environment, conditions of the workplace, tools

and structures to allow employees to do their job and the nature of the work, e.g. challenge and variety, have both direct and indirect effects on engagement (Hammady et al., 2014; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Anitha,2014).

C) Supervisor Support

Supervisors act as agents of the organization, who have responsibility for directing and evaluating subordinates' performance, employees would view their supervisor's favorable or unfavourable orientation toward them as indicative of the organization's support (Eisenberger et al., 1986).The relationship a worker has with the supervisor plays a crucial role in determining his engagement level (Kahn, 1990; May et al.2004). The relationship between the supervisor and the employee has been found to have the greatest impact on psychological safety. Experiencing psychological safety is often seen in relationships that are supportive and trusting (May et al., 2004). The manager plays a crucial role in engagement (Lockwood, 2007). Supervisors who encourage a supportive work environment display concern for employees' needs and feelings, provide positive feedback encourage them to voice their concerns, and develop new skills (Pandey and David,2013).The line manager plays an important role in fostering the employees' sense of value and involvement (Robinson et al., 2004;2007). Macleode and Clarke (2010) have identified an 'Engaging Manager" as a person who has clarity, and appreciation of employees' effort and contribution, who treat their people as individuals, and who ensure that work is organised efficiently and effectively so that employees feel they are valued, and equipped and supported to do their job as the key enabler of engagement. Payne & Huffman (2005) strongly indicate that immediate managers play a major role in employee turnover decisions and also emphasize that managers create a workplace climate that is positive, empowering, and safe for employees. A 'high PSS supervisor' delivers important benefits on a regular basis (e.g. consideration, good assignments, flexible work schedules, feedback, recommendations, and recognition). When supervisors are perceived to provide such support, they are likely to elicit positive feelings and trust from employees (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).Employees also reported that when supervisor valued their contributions and cared about their well-being this increased Perceived Organization Support, which in turn was related to decreased turnover(Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski and Rhoades,2002).

D) Perceived Organizational Support

There should be an environment of flexibility in which employees can try and not be scared of consequences. Based on the Social-Exchange theory the employees feel obligated to work for the organization's well-being. Job resources such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, are positively associated with work engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker., 2004; Bakker,2009; Bakker, and Demerouti,2008). However, the strong base of engagement can be seen in self-determination theory, social exchange theory (Saks,2006), and motivation theories. Saks(2006) further went on to identify distributive and procedural justice on the perception of consistency and procedures to allocate the rewards.On the basis of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), three general forms of perceived favorable treatment received from the organization (i.e., fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards and job conditions) should increase POS. Pride in working with organisations is a key factor for engagement (Pandey and David,2013).

E) Rewards and Recognition

Rewards are an indispensable attribute to employee engagement that motivates an employee to achieve more and hence focus more on work and personal development. It involves both financial and non-financial rewards. Attractive compensation comprises a combination of pay, bonuses, and other financial rewards as well as non-financial rewards like extra holidays and voucher schemes (Anita 2014). Kahn (1992) has elucidated the importance of formal and informal systems of rewards to enhance meaningful teamwork and employee participation that promotes authenticity of communication and constructive feedback. To do this, the incentive systems have to be tied to those structures that support the presence. Robinson et al., (2004, 2007) in the IES engagement research indicate that pay and benefits, and two-way communication as components of the engagement driver “feeling valued and involved”.

Saks (2006) identified rewards and recognition to foster a sense of return on investments in addition to meaningful work. A study by Choi, Geong, and Geinberg (2012) has identified monetary rewards as clearly effective in reducing call centre employee turnover intentions in the absence of clear career paths and depersonalization. Also, the greater the monetary reward, the more likely the reduced personal accomplishment was to influence turnover intentions. Eisenberg et al., (1986) have identified organizational support as a part of inferring the organization’s readiness to reward greater efforts toward meeting organization goals. So, rewards play a dynamic role in engagement. Studies have identified rewards from Bhatnagar (2007) and recognition (David and Pandey., 2013) as important factors for engagement.

F) Core-Self Evaluations

Kahn (1990; 1992) in his study had propounded that psychological availability is an important factor for creating employee engagement in the workplace. He further articulated psychological availability as individuals’ readiness to personally engage at a particular moment (Kahn, 1990). And further went on to explain that individuals who are psychologically available perceive themselves to be ready and are prepared to put their energies namely physical, cognitive, and emotional role performance, and thus, they tend to exhibit higher engagement in role performances. One of the important determinants of psychological availability is an individual having a general level of confidence in his or her own abilities, status, and self-consciousness that leaves more or less room for investments of self in role performances (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1992) further suggested that this type of confidence is a relatively stable individual difference, and it operates in such a way that the more generally confident the individual feels about his or her capabilities and status, the more likely the individual is to feel available and prepared to engage fully in his or her role (Rich et al., 2010). Judge Locke, & Durham (1997) in their work define core-self evaluation as a broad, latent, higher-order trait indicated by four well-established traits in the personality literature namely self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control. In simple, term core self-evaluation is a basic, fundamental appraisal of one’s worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person. An individual who scores high on core self-evaluations is someone who is well-adjusted, positive, self-confident, efficacious, and believes in

their own agency, it is this broad core that is then manifested in high levels of self-esteem, emotional stability, and general self-efficacy, and an internal locus of control. Although core self-evaluations have been linked to motivational concepts such as goal setting and overall task motivation (e.g., Erez & Judge, 2001), few indicative publications (Rich et al.,2010) have linked the concept to engagement that in turn leads to enhanced employee performances.

G) Job Demands and Job Resources

Job demands and job resources are the major constituents of any job. At the heart of the Job Resources (JD-R) model lies the assumption that whereas every occupation may have its own specific risk factors associated with job stress, these factors can be classified into two general categories (i.e. job demands and job resources), thus constituting an overarching model that may be applied to various occupational settings, irrespective of the particular demands and resources involved(Bakker and Demerouti,2007). Jones and Fletcher (1996, define demands as 'the degree to which the environment contains stimuli that peremptorily require attention and response. Demands are the "things that have to be done.'Every job has a mandate set of things that have to be done, which are not necessarily negative things but might lead to stressors if that job demands high sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort that elicit negative responses such as depression, anxiety, or burnout. Schaufeli and Bakker(2004) propound job demands as those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. For example: work overload and emotional job demands (Bakker A.B.,2011; Bakker & Demerouti,2007; Schaufeli, Leiter& Maslach,2009)And defined job resources as those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that either/or (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (2) are functional in achieving work goals; (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development. For example, the task level (performance feedback), the interpersonal level (support from colleagues), and the organizational level (supervisory coaching) are constituents of job resources(Bakker A.B.,2011; Bakker & Demerouti,2007; Schaufeli, Leiter& Maslach,2009).In a study, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001) tested the job-demands resources model and propounded that that job demands (i.e., physical demands, time pressure, shift work) are associated with exhaustion, whereas lacking job resources (i.e., performance feedback, job control, participation in decision making, social support) are associated with disengagement. Hence the job demands exhaust the employee's energy backup whereas the availability of job resources plays an extrinsic motivational role because work environments that offer many resources foster the willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to the work task.

H) Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the outcomes achieved and accomplishments made at work. Performance refers to keeping up with plans while aiming for results. According to Dyer and Reeves (1995), the indicators of performance refer to output measures namely improved retention, reduced

absenteeism, productivity, and product and service quality. Employee engagement plays a key role in fostering high levels of employee performance and studies (Fleming and Asplund, 2007; Rich et al., 2010; Richman, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008) have identified EE as the vital determinant for employee engagement. Studies (Coffman, 2000; Harter et al., 2002; Hewitt Associates, 2004; Coffman and Gonzalez-Molina, 2002) have found positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance outcomes: employee retention, productivity, profitability, customer loyalty and safety. Researches also indicate that the more engaged employees are, the more likely their employer is to exceed the industry average in its revenue growth. These studies further emphasise that high levels of employee engagement enhance job performance, task performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, productivity, discretionary effort, affective commitment, and continuance commitment. Studies prove that sustainability is key to organisational survival that is intrinsic to establishing the foundation of performance (Baptiste, 2008). With this in mind, it is only reasonable to assume that organisational survival can be predicated on the performance of its human capital. In line with other studies, Demerouti, Cropanzano, Bakker & Leiter (2010) propound that engagement can lead to enhanced performance. These findings are congruent with a number of studies that posit a positive relationship between engagement and individual performance (Halbesleben, 2010; Mone and London, 2010).

I) Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The overarching force behind the reason for employee engagement is that it has positive consequences for organizations. From above, the impact employee engagement has on the bottom-line outcomes can be inferred. However, engagement is an individual-level construct and if it does lead to business results, it must first impact individual-level outcomes. Along these lines, there is reason to expect employee engagement to be related to individuals' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Saks, 2006). The first mention of the term OCB was expressed in an essay by Organ (1977, as cited in Organ and Paine, 1999), where he propounded that the traditional view of performance had been in terms of hard outcomes measurable against job descriptions, but what had not been considered were the softer issues such as an employee turning up on time and following organisational rules. OCB was later defined as: *'individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective running of the organisation.'* (Organ, 1988). Engaged employees are usually defined as fully there, attentive, and willing to go the extra mile for the organization. From the above definition, it can be understood that the behaviour is discretionary or extra-role so that the employee has a choice over whether they perform such behaviour. As these types of behaviour are not usually part of the reward system, the absence of such behaviours is therefore not punishable by the organisation but the performance of them should lead to the effective running of it. Hence, based on some of the indicative publications it can be articulated that engaged employees are those who are willing to put in discretionary effort and are willing to go the extra mile for the organization they work in.

Step 2: Laws of Interaction

The laws of interaction in a theory refer to the relationships among the units (or concepts) of that theory (Dubin, 1978) and explain how changes in one or more units of the theory impact the other units. Dubin (1978) delineated three types of laws of interaction: categoric, sequential, and determinant.

Categoric law states that the values of a unit of a theory are related to the values of another unit of the theory, while sequential law of interaction is “asymmetrical”, denoting a “time-lapse” between the units of interest and a “unidirectional” relationship. Finally, the determinant law of interaction is “one that relates determinate values of one unit of the theory with determinate values of another unit” (Lynham, 2002). The paper proposes a theoretical model of the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement that is comprised of the following laws of interaction.

Categorical Laws:

1. There is a greater-than-chance probability that workplace environment, supervisor support, perceived organizational support, rewards and recognition, job demands, and resources are associated with employee engagement.
2. There is an interaction between employee engagement, employee performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Sequential Laws:

3. Workplace environment, supervisor support, perceived organizational support, rewards and recognition, job demands, and resources precede employee engagement
4. Employee engagement precedes employee performance and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Step 3: The Boundaries of a Theoretical Model of Employee Engagement

Dubin (1978) posits that there has to be an open and a closed boundary in which a model has to system. He distinguished Dubin (1978) distinguished between a closed and open boundary, defining a closed system as “one in which some kind of exchange takes place between the system and its environment” (p. 253) and an open boundary as one in which “there is exchange over the boundary between the domains through which the boundary extends”. Congruent with the above boundaries, this study has implicated one closed and one open boundary for the proposed theoretical model. The closed boundary refers to the overall area where the EE model has to work and the open boundary exists within this closed boundary and refers to the organizational and contextual environment whereby employee engagement, its antecedents, and its consequences take place.

Step 4: Specifying System States of a Theoretical Model of Employee Engagement

By system states, Dubin (1978) defined by three features namely 1) all units of the system have characteristic values, 2) the characteristic values of all units are determinant, and 3) the constellation of unit values persists through time”. This was based on three criteria namely *inclusiveness* (all the units of the system are included in the system state), having *determinant values* (all units have measurable values and are distinctive or unique), and *persistence* (the state of the system persists through a period of time).

Satisfying the above-mentioned requirements, critical units of the system and these units have
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characteristic values (the units that have been identified as important in the existing literature on engagement), there is no overlap in values between the units (i.e., each unit can be assigned a distinctive value), and the proposed relationships between the units persist over time. Using the categoric law of interaction, the coding method has been employed which states that

- 1) If work environment, supervisor support, perceived organizational support, rewards and recognition, job demands, and resources are present in the system, then employee engagement transits from 0 to 1 under the conditions that: if these units are used, enhance and sustained that will lead to increased employee engagement.
- 2) If employee engagement is present in the system, then employee performance and organizational citizenship behaviors transition from 0 to 1 under the conditions that employee engagement is fostered to a high level.

Step 5: Propositions of a Theoretic Model

A proposition is a “truth statement about a model when the model is fully specified in its units, laws of interaction, boundary, and system states” (Dubin, 1978). Propositions should be appropriate to the theoretical model and subject to empirical testing. Hence for the study, eight sets of propositions have been derived for the theoretical model of employee engagement.

P1: Work environment is positively associated with high levels of employee engagement

P2: Supervisor Support is positively associated with high levels of employee engagement

P3: Percieved organizational support is positively associated with high levels of employee engagement

P4: Core-self evaluations is positively associated with high levels of employee engagement

P5: Rewards and recognition is positively associated with high levels of employee engagement

P6: The relationship between work environment, supervisor support, perceived organizational support, core-self evaluations and rewards and recognition and employee engagement are moderated by job demands and resources.

P7: Employee engagement is positively related to job performance.

P8: Employee engagement is positively related to employee organizational citizenship behaviors.

Conclusions

Employee engagement is considered by employers and management consulting firms alike as a desirable organisational asset given its promised return of higher levels of organisational performance (e.g. Harter et al., 2002; Vance, 2006). Understanding the momentum of the concept various

engagement strategies are crafted to gain the advantage of human capital. Employee engagement is the perfect tool that can be harnessed for realising the full potential of a workforce to capture the hearts, minds, and souls of the employees (Fleming and Asplund,2007).Hence, the concept of engagement is recognised among practitioners and academia alike. In this paper, a theoretical model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement has been developed based on Dubin’s method.This paper offers a logical framework on which empirical indicators and hypotheses could be framed in order to check the proposed theory. This can further be used to test the next steps of Dubin’s(1978) methodology for recognizing empirical indicators of the key terms, formulating hypotheses, and real testing of the theoretical model. In addition, the last steps are vital for projecting the model or framework as an ‘empirically verified and trustworthy’ model.

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