



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com



The workforce culture in a state university in the Philippines: Drivers of engagement

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the primary drivers of employee engagement at a State University in the Philippines, focusing on exploring similarities and differences across faculty and staff groups. A quantitative survey was distributed to 232 faculty and staff respondents to collect data on factors influencing their engagement levels. Results revealed distinct engagement drivers for each employee group: Permanent Faculty prioritized employee trust, organizational integrity, inspirational leadership, and career growth opportunities. In contrast, Permanent Staff emphasized recognition through rewards for high performance and managerial support, highlighting the importance of acknowledgment and listening. These findings underscore the need for tailored human resource strategies that address unique engagement factors for each employee group within the university. The study recommends expanding leadership development programs, implementing comprehensive recognition and reward systems, and ensuring ample career advancement opportunities to foster a more engaged workforce. This research offers valuable guidance for improving organizational practices and fostering a more engaged workforce at the university.

Keywords: Culture, Drivers of engagement, Employee, Faculty, Staff, Workforce.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i9.10710

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

History: Received: 20 August 2025 / Revised: 22 September 2025 / Accepted: 26 September 2025 / Published: 22 October 2025

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Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Institutional Research Ethics Committee of Mountain Province State Polytechnic College, Philippines, has granted clearance for this study on July 15, 2024. Also, this study followed all ethical practices during the writing.

Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

Workforce engagement in higher education refers to the level of enthusiasm, commitment, and emotional investment employees demonstrate toward their work. Employee engagement has a profound impact on an organization's success. According to Wasilowski [1] addressing employee engagement within higher education institutions can offer substantial benefits to institutions and the broader community. Engaged employees are more productive, exhibit higher job

satisfaction, and contribute more meaningfully to the academic and institutional mission [2, 3]. However, engagement is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic process, influenced by various factors such as leadership style, institutional policies, work-life balance, professional development opportunities, and organizational support systems [4]. As Shyam and Shashank [5] argue, a robust and positive institutional culture—characterized by transparency, leadership support, and work-life balance—directly impacts employee engagement. Additionally, Celino [6] finds that institutions with an inclusive and participative culture see higher levels of engagement, particularly across diverse educational contexts. Studies by Narayan [7] emphasize the importance of inclusive practices in both employee engagement and retention, while Shyam and Shashank [5] identify key engagement drivers, such as alignment with the institutional mission, professional development, and work-life balance. Moreover, Parveen and Rizq [8] highlight that those institutions offering flexible working hours and remote work options experience higher levels of engagement among faculty and staff. Collaborative work environments and inclusive leadership practices, for instance, have been shown to foster a sense of belonging and job satisfaction Demerouti and Bakker [9]. Macey and Schneider [10] emphasize the role of institutional culture in shaping employee attitudes, noting that institutions promoting a culture of shared purpose and open communication tend to achieve higher engagement levels and lower burnout rates. Transformational leadership, which motivates and inspires employees through empowerment, trust, and professional development, also plays a critical role in cultivating engagement and a positive workforce culture [11].

At a state university in the Philippines, the administration recognizes the importance of workforce engagement in achieving institutional goals. The university promotes employee engagement through various initiatives, including effective communication, recognition systems, empowerment, and professional development opportunities. Engaged employees are more productive, satisfied, and committed, leading to reduced turnover and increased customer satisfaction. As a result of these efforts, the university has seen improvements in employee retention, job satisfaction, and institutional reputation. Despite the clear benefits of an engaged workforce, a research gap remains in understanding how specific institutional contexts, such as those at the university which shape employee engagement strategies and outcomes. While broad frameworks for engagement are well-established, the nuanced impact of the university's unique institutional culture, regional factors, and organizational practices has not been thoroughly explored. Addressing this gap will provide valuable insights into tailored engagement strategies that account for the distinctive characteristics of the state university and similar institutions.

The study highlights the importance of implementing work-life balance initiatives to boost employee engagement, job satisfaction, and performance in the Philippine public sector. It suggests that flexible work arrangements and supportive policies are essential for improving employee well-being, leading to increased productivity and better service delivery. The study offers recommendations for policymakers and HR practitioners to develop effective work-life balance policies that cater to the needs of public sector employees. Policymakers should prioritize creating flexible work arrangements and supportive policies, while HR practitioners should design programs that address the needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities. Managers should also promote a work culture that values work-life balance. Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of work-life balance initiatives across different public sector sectors and positions. The study, therefore, aims to identify the top 10 drivers of engagement of the faculty and staff, including areas for improvement.

2. Materials and Methods

The primary material used was a survey questionnaire Top 30 Questions to Conduct an Employee Engagement Survey – LumApps [12] comprising 30 statements to assess various dimensions of employee engagement, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and perceptions of institutional support. The researchers grouped the respondents into two categories: Faculty and Staff. They further subdivided these categories based on employment status, either permanent or contract of service. The questionnaire was made accessible via Google Drive, allowing respondents the convenience of completing it online. Additionally, some respondents opted to fill out a hard copy of the questionnaire to accommodate different preferences. The researchers asked respondents to rank their top ten choices from the statements, providing a prioritized view of the most significant factors. This ranking approach helped highlight the most critical drivers of engagement according to employee perspectives.

3. Results and Discussions

As summarized in Table 1 the survey results highlight distinct preferences between permanent MPSU faculty and staff regarding the drivers of engagement, while Table 1b is for the contract of service. This difference in ranking suggests that Faculty and staff value certain aspects of their work environment differently, influencing their overall engagement with the organization.

For permanent faculty members, the highest-ranking driver of engagement is trust and integrity between employees and the organization. The findings show that the MPSU faculty members prioritize ethical alignment and reliability with the institution. Faculty may view trust as the foundation for a productive, collegial environment and the mutual respect needed to foster meaningful relationships with colleagues and leadership. Bogyo [13] stressed that employees who feel supported by their leaders are more engaged, productive, and likely to stay. On the other hand, permanent staff members ranked rewards for high performance as their top driver of engagement. The findings indicate that staff members may feel more motivated when their contributions are recognized and rewarded. Recognizing high performance could be linked to the tangible nature of staff roles, where compensation and acknowledgment of achievements are strong motivators. According to Armstrong [14] reward systems that acknowledge high performance increase job satisfaction, motivation, and

overall engagement. Often, more operational and performance-driven staff roles may place more value on recognition and tangible rewards as motivators.

Table 1.
Survey on Drivers of Engagement according to Permanent Faculty and Staff.

Statement on Drivers of Engagement	Rating/Rank (Permanent Faculty)	Rank (Permanent Staff)
Trust and integrity between the employees and the organization	(68%) Rank 1	(38%) Rank 8
Career growth or advancement opportunities	(52%) Rank 3	(44%) Rank 3
Learning and development opportunities include training, coaching, mentoring, job rotation, cross-posting (different office), or participation in challenging work assignments	(46%) Rank 5	(42%) Rank 5
Recognition of good work (formal or informal, including praise that is timely and sincere)	(43%) Rank 8	(43%) Rank 4
Rewards for high performance	(40%) Rank 9	(56%) Rank 1
Participation in decision-making processes	(45%) Rank 6	(36%) Rank 9
Teamwork, including support from other employees in the organization, effective internal cooperation, and a sense of belongingness	(44%) Rank 7	(40%) Rank 6
Transparency and maintaining ethical standards	(48%) Rank 4	(39%) Rank 7
Strong, positive, and inspirational leadership	(53%) Rank 2	(35%) Rank 10
Managers listen to these views and value employees' contributions	(38%) Rank 10	(55%) Rank 2

Among permanent faculty members, strong, favorable, and inspirational leadership was ranked second. At the same time, staff placed more importance on managers who listen to their views and value their contributions, ranking it second. The findings suggest that Faculty may prioritize motivating leadership more because their academic roles often require guidance and direction. On the other hand, staff might focus more on rewards and recognition. Goleman [15] emphasizes how emotional intelligence in leadership plays a crucial role in inspiring and motivating others. Leaders who demonstrate this emotional awareness are better equipped to connect with and inspire their teams.

Both permanent Faculty and staff placed career growth and advancement opportunities in the third spot, showing that they both recognize how important career development is. However, faculty might view this as slightly more crucial because their career paths and advancement opportunities differ from those of staff. Career growth for faculty is vital for them to earn points for promotion. According to Deci and Ryan [16] in their Self-Determination Theory, having opportunities for career growth is essential for fulfilling basic psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, Aziedjo [17] highlights that the Strategic career development program implementation is a potent means to increase engagement, retain high-performing employees, and enhance overall productivity. These opportunities directly shape faculty members' academic achievements and leadership roles, strengthening their professional satisfaction and motivation. Institutions acknowledge their impact, ensuring faculty engagement remains a priority in educational and leadership development. Moreover, Moody [18] emphasizes that if employees are given more opportunities to develop and advance their knowledge and skills by their employer, they are more likely to gain a sense of purpose in their work, leading to increased motivation, engagement, and buy-in.

Among the key drivers of employee engagement, transparency and ethical standards were ranked fourth by permanent Faculty and seventh by permanent staff. This suggests that faculty members emphasize transparency and ethical practices within their organization more than staff. In contrast, while still essential to organizational success, staff roles may not always have the same level of direct involvement with the ethical dimensions of academic output or decision-making. As such, while staff still value ethical standards, they may prioritize other engagement drivers, such as recognition or career growth, over transparency. Gillespie, et al. [19] argue that ethical leadership, emphasizing transparency, fairness, and integrity, directly impacts employee trust and engagement. For Faculty, often seen as role models within their institutions, the expectation for ethical conduct and transparency is exceptionally high, especially in maintaining academic credibility and public trust. Additionally, Treviño and Brown [20] highlight that transparent communication from leadership significantly enhances employee commitment and creates a positive work environment.

Both permanent Faculty and permanent staff ranked learning and development opportunities as the fifth most important factor for engagement, showing that both groups value professional growth and training. For Faculty, ongoing development is key for career advancement and their roles as educators and researchers. Faculty members must stay updated in their fields, contribute to academic discussions, and continue learning to be effective in their jobs. In contrast,

while staff value development, their roles do not require the same level of continuous academic learning. However, opportunities to develop new skills and advance their careers are essential for job satisfaction and long-term organizational engagement. According to Noe [21] offering growth opportunities helps employees improve their skills, which leads to higher job satisfaction and motivation. Birdi [22] also found that continuous professional development boosts employee engagement, especially when employees see it as a way to improve their skills and career growth. This suggests that Faculty who require ongoing intellectual development value these opportunities more than staff, even though development is still essential for staff in different ways.

Participation in decision-making processes was identified as a key driver of engagement for Faculty and staff. This reflects both groups' vital role in shaping academic and administrative decisions within the institution. According to research by Mirji, et al. [23] organizations with positive employee orientation, wherein employees are given freedom for experimentation with various ideas and are consulted for decisions, are found to be engaged and can put extra effort into fulfilling the business goals. Research by Jafri [24] emphasizes the importance of involving employees in decision-making, as it leads to a stronger sense of ownership and commitment, which drives engagement. Faculty, typically more involved in academic decision-making, might value this factor more than staff. However, the study by Lee and Neerpal [25] examines the positive effects of participative decision-making on employee engagement and overall well-being. The authors highlight that involving employees in decision-making processes enhances their sense of empowerment and job satisfaction, leading to increased motivation and commitment. However, staff members prioritize teamwork more, likely due to their collaborative work environments.

The importance of recognition is more pronounced among staff, who ranked it higher than Faculty in terms of engagement. This suggests that staff members may feel their contributions are less acknowledged, making recognition a critical motivator for their engagement. Kuvaas [26] underscores the significance of recognition in driving employee motivation and engagement, particularly when it is perceived as fair and meaningful. This factor becomes especially important for staff, who might not receive the same recognition or visibility as Faculty.

These differing rankings provide valuable insights into the priorities and expectations of Faculty and staff. Understanding these distinctions allows the organization to tailor engagement strategies to each group's needs, ensuring Faculty and staff feel supported, valued, and motivated. The comparison of engagement drivers between permanent Faculty and staff at MPSPC reveals distinct preferences. Faculty prioritize trust, leadership, and involvement in decision-making, focusing on ethical relationships and professional development. Staff, however, emphasize rewards, managerial responsiveness, and recognition, indicating a stronger focus on material incentives and organizational interaction. Understanding these differences can help tailor engagement strategies to address each group's needs and preferences, ultimately enhancing overall employee satisfaction and institutional performance. Table 2 shows the survey on the drivers of engagement as perceived by the contract of service faculty (COS) and staff.

Table 2.
Survey on Drivers of Engagement by Contract of Service.

Statement on Drivers of Engagement	Rank (COS Faculty)	Rank (COS Staff)
Pride in organization	(80%) Rank 2	(65%) Rank 7
Learning and development opportunities include training, coaching, mentoring, job rotation, cross-posting (different office), or participation in challenging work assignments	(78%) Rank 3	(76%) Rank 1
Recognition of good work (formal or informal, including praise that is timely and sincere)	(64%) Rank 9	(64%) Rank 8
Teamwork, including support from other employees in the organization, effective internal cooperation, and a sense of belongingness	(62%) Rank 10	(62%) Rank 9
Transparency and maintaining ethical standards	(68%) Rank 7	(60%) Rank 10
Fairness at work	(66%) Rank 8	(74%) Rank 2
Strong, positive, and inspirational leadership	(90%) Rank 1	(66%) Rank 6
Clarity of job expectations – sufficient knowledge and information is provided	(74%) Rank 4	(72%) Rank 3
Ongoing provision of resources, including materials and equipment, to do effective and efficient work	(72%) Rank 5	(70%) Rank 4
Having a best friend, buddy, or trusted colleague at work	(70%) Rank 6	(68%) Rank 5

For COS Faculty, strong positive and inspirational leadership is the most critical driver of engagement. The finding shows that the MPSU COS faculty members place a high value on leadership that is motivating, visionary, and inspiring. Faculty roles are often more autonomous, requiring them to manage their research, teaching, and academic responsibilities. Therefore, leadership that provides support, guidance, and encouragement is crucial for their sense of engagement and job

satisfaction. Faculty members thrive when they feel their leaders can inspire them to excel in their intellectual and academic pursuits. Gao, et al. [27] in their findings underscore the pivotal role of transformational leadership in fostering the establishment and growth of professional learning communities. Leaders can effectively enhance the cohesion and learning effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities by stimulating member participation and cooperation, promoting internal learning and innovation within the organization. Faculty, with their highly independent roles, are more likely to be motivated by leaders who provide vision and support and challenge them to grow professionally and personally. The study highlighted that emotional intelligence fosters a positive organizational culture, as emotionally intelligent Faculty are likely to promote collaboration and community engagement. Furthermore, the research suggested that developing emotional intelligence among Faculty and leadership can enhance commitment and improve the overall organizational environment. As a result, the authors recommend that higher education institutions implement training programs focused on cultivating emotional intelligence to strengthen faculty retention, commitment, and engagement within the academic community.

On the other hand, for COS Staff, learning and development opportunities rank as the top driver of engagement. Staff members value professional growth and the chance to develop new skills or advance in their careers. Unlike Faculty, staff often perform roles that are more task-focused, and for them, continuous learning is a key motivator. Opportunities for training and career development are given to the COS staff. They are encouraged to attend seminars and training and enroll in advanced studies. With the support and assistance provided to them, they feel valued and supported, which could increase their job satisfaction and long-term commitment to the institution. Dachner, et al. [28] argue that human capital development is as important as ever for employers and employees. Organizations can better manage human capital by leveraging how employees proactively develop themselves as a strategic supplement to formal training and development practices.

Another driver of engagement identified by the COS Faculty is pride in the organization, which is ranked as the second most important driver of engagement. Faculty members derive a sense of engagement when they feel proud of their institution, its values, and its achievements. This pride often stems from being part of an academic institution that they believe in and whose mission aligns with their professional values and goals. The COS faculty members take pride in MPSU and are more committed to its success, which leads to higher engagement and satisfaction in their roles. Although the faculty members are on a service contract, they are treated the same as the permanent Faculty, with whom they feel a sense of belonging. The study revealed that Faculty who align their academic values with their institution's mission and goals exhibit more outstanding commitment and dedication to their work. This alignment fosters a sense of belonging, motivating Faculty to go beyond their essential responsibilities and actively contribute to the institution's success. Moreover, the researchers highlighted that cultivating organizational pride within academic settings improves job satisfaction and overall faculty morale, ultimately benefiting the institution. Perel [29] also stressed that organizational pride goes beyond job satisfaction. It is a deep-seated belief in a company's values, mission, and impact. Proud employees actively contribute to their company's success and remain emotionally invested in its growth by not just clocking in and out.

For COS Staff, fairness at work is the second most important driver of engagement. Staff members place a high value on fair treatment and equitable access to opportunities and resources. Many COS staff who have been with the institution for years feel intensely loyal, partly because they are treated fairly, much like permanent employees. The institution prioritizes fairness, striving to create a work environment where decisions are made and everyone receives respectful treatment. This sense of being valued helps boost their engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment to the institution. Colquitt, et al. [30] highlight that organizational justice, or fairness in decision-making, how employees are treated, and the distribution of rewards play a significant role in shaping employee attitudes. When staff feel that their workplace is fair, they are more likely to feel respected and valued, which drives higher engagement and job satisfaction. Ozsahin and Yurur [31] explain that employees' dissent behaviors are influenced by the fairness of formal rules and procedures and acquisitions rather than the fairness of managerial relationships.

Both COS Faculty and COS Staff ranked career growth or advancement opportunities as the third most important driver of engagement. This consistent ranking across both groups highlights the universal value placed on career development as a key factor in driving engagement. Regardless of their roles or status within the institution, Faculty and staff recognize that opportunities to advance and grow are essential for long-term motivation and job satisfaction. At MPSU, all employees, regardless of their position, are provided with opportunities for capability-building activities and advanced studies—an effort to ensure that everyone has access to development and growth opportunities. In their Self-Determination Theory, Deci and Ryan [32] emphasize that career growth opportunities are vital for fulfilling employees' psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Employees who see opportunities for advancement are more likely to feel motivated and engaged, as these opportunities help fulfill their intrinsic desires for personal growth and career development. Meyers and Van Woerkom [33] argue that opportunities for career development are closely tied to employee engagement and organizational commitment. They suggest that when employees have clear pathways for advancement and feel their growth is supported, their level of engagement increases. This aligns with the findings from both COS faculty and staff, who consistently see career development as a top priority for staying engaged and satisfied in their roles. Nava-de Jesus and Almari [34] found that employees are happy with their work because they can learn and grow with the organization. Likewise, employees are willing to stay with the organization because of good opportunities and career growth. The study revealed that faculty members who perceive clear pathways for career advancement are more emotionally invested in their work and more aligned with their institution's goals. Participants indicated that professional growth is essential for their competence and commitment to the institution, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of

belonging and motivation to contribute to organizational success. The research underscores that higher education institutions must prioritize career development initiatives to improve faculty engagement and retention effectively. Increased job satisfaction and long-term engagement shape the experiences of COS faculty and staff, who rank career growth as a key factor in their work engagement.

Other drivers of engagement perceived by the COS faculty and COS staff include the following: (1) learning and development opportunities, including training, coaching, mentoring, job rotation, cross posting; By offering personalized assistance and fostering a collaborative environment, mentoring, and coaching initiatives encourage employees to be more engaged in their work, resulting in increased motivation and organizational commitment. Ultimately, the findings underscore the importance of implementing effective mentoring and coaching programs to enhance employee engagement and workplace satisfaction. Additionally, job rotation and cross-posting are associated with reduced job monotony and the stimulation of creativity and innovation, which improves employee engagement Gratton and Ghoshal [35] (2) having a best friend, buddy, or trusted colleague at work; the presence of a "buddy" or a best friend at work not only provides emotional support but also contributes to a sense of belonging and community, which are essential for fostering engagement Vance [36] (3) transparency and maintaining ethical standards; (4) recognition of good work; (5) ongoing provision of resources including materials and equipment to do effective and efficient work; and (6) teamwork including support from other employees in the organization, practical internal cooperation, and a sense of belongingness. The COS faculty and COS staff perceive all of these drivers to have them engaged at work.

4. Conclusion

This study compared the drivers of employee engagement among different groups at Mountain Province State University, including Permanent Faculty, Permanent Staff, COS Faculty, and COS Staff. The findings highlight similarities and differences in what drives engagement for these groups. For Permanent Faculty, trust and integrity within the organization were the top sources of engagement, emphasizing ethical behavior and mutual respect. In contrast, Permanent Staff valued rewards for high performance and the consideration of employees' input by managers, showing a greater focus on recognition and managerial support. Both groups acknowledged the importance of career growth and learning opportunities, but their concerns differed in impact. COS Faculty prioritized leadership, while COS Staff focused more on meetings and professional development. COS Faculty ranked leadership as their top concern, whereas COS Staff prioritized learning opportunities and fairness in the workplace. This suggests that COS Faculty value inspirational leadership more, while COS Staff care more about personal growth and equality at work. These drivers enhance employee satisfaction and improve productivity, retention, and organizational performance. By focusing on these factors, organizations can create a more engaged and motivated workforce, ultimately fostering a thriving work environment.

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