



RE-IMAGINING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WITH CHANGING TIMES : A QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

An engaged workforce is a key to organizational success. Currently engagement is seen as another core competitive advantage for any organization and top management has shown a great interest in engaging their employees to retain talent in the organization as well as to improve satisfaction of employees along with service of clients. According to a report published by Forbes, employees, who do not feel engaged are more likely to resign from their jobs and highly engaged workforce is more likely to remain committed and motivated towards their employer. Contribution of Service Sector in India in terms of GDP at current prices is estimated to be Rs. 92.26 lakh crore in the year 2018-19, accounting for 54.40% of total GDP India as per the statistics issued by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2018-2019). Management needs to acquire the understanding of factors driving engagement levels in their organization. The study aims to identify antecedents of employee engagement in current scenario with special reference to service sector by undertaking thorough review of literature and interviewing the HR managers. The antecedents derived are skill variety, feedback and autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), Perceive Supervisory Support (Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016), (Zhong, 2016), rewards and recognition, concern for employees, sense of ownership and social engagements etc.

KEYWORDS: Antecedents, Culture, Employee Engagement, Fun Activities, Work Culture, Organizational Commitment, Oorganizational Policies

INTRODUCTION

Organisations in recent year are showing great interest in engagement of employees in the organisation. Studies suggest that the prime enabler of successful implementation of any business policy and accomplishment of business objectives may be employee engagement. Employee engagement has become a very important construct for both practitioners and researchers (Robertson, Robertson, & Cooper, 2012). However, the studies are limited in exploring the specific and contextual employee engagement antecedents (Saks, 2006), prominent to the conviction that there can be many paths to foster the same and no one technique is going to fit each and every organisations (Lockwood N. , 2007). Employee engagement generally involves the commitment and involvement level of an employee has towards the organisation (Saxena & Srivastava, 2015). An engaged employee is aware of his responsibility. Simultaneously he also motivates his colleagues to successfully achieve business goals (Anitha, 2014). Introduced in the year 1990s, the term engagement gained significant popularity in business. It has

become an interesting topic to explore among scholars across disciplines such as, civic engagement, customer engagement, social engagement and employee engagement have been used to express it. It is argued that engagement is an individual's perception about himself, and hence self-rating is essential (Gupta, Acharya, & Gupta, 2015). According to Ibrahim and Falasi (2014), the relative importance of employee engagement must be duly addressed by managers with special reference to public sectors of UAE since, it will lead to enhanced employee performance, rising job satisfaction, and subsequently leading to improved organisational outcome and help to achieve them effectively. Therefore, it is said that among organizational leaders, employee engagement is key issue to focus. (Seijts & Crim, 2006). Since employees are the fundamental assets of any organization (Lockwood, 2007). The employees provide viable advantage, are a treasured asset and a key to enhance efficiency in the organization. Human Resources practitioners and researchers over the years have found that passionate workers are an inexhaustible asset to the organizations. Previous researchers



also found that individually employees want to seek more meaningful work in their day-to-day work than what they do in personal lives.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

An engaged work force is capable of building core competitive advantage for its organisation which is further associated with higher levels of talent retention, innovation, and improved worker satisfaction. Thus, it is essential for organisations to estimate the worker engagement level. But several studies stated that only approximately 30% of workers are “engaged”. Another 50% are “disengaged”, which means they are doing the bare minimum needed. The data states the relevance of study of employee engagements. Given the association between worker engagement and business success, it has currently become most crucial for the organisations to consider worker engagement on top priority basis.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to identify antecedents of employee engagement in current scenario with special reference to service sector. Employee engagement dimensions cannot be defined and listed as a universal variable. There can be various means to engage employees in the organisation depending upon nature of company, nature of job profile, the demographics of employees belonging to the company, work culture etc. Therefore, by undertaking review of literature and interviewing the HR managers; the study aims to compare existing variables of employee engagement present in theory and in real perspective.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative research design the study was conducted in two stages. The researcher aims to identify key antecedents to employee engagement by way of:

1. Stage 1: Telephonic with HR managers was conducted.
2. Stage 2: A thorough review of literature was conducted using various leading journal such as Emerald, Sage, Elsevier, science direct etc.

STAGE 1: TELEPHONIC WITH HR MANAGERS

For telephonic interviews, the target population were HR managers working in private sector. A total number of 42 HR manager were approached for the interview, out of which only 20 were able to complete the interview. Interviewees were given a brief about the study and scope of the research and what way their discussion will help in the research. Also, they were provided a written mail regarding the brief of the survey, and it was well communicated to them that it is going to be an open-ended discussion. The discussion will be used only for academic research purpose only and no part of interview shall be leaked. Their average working experience was 4 years working with their respective current organisation and 14 years on an average they are working with corporates as HR personnel. Name, designation, company profile. Since how many years you are associated with this company? What is your total work experience? What employee engagement related activities your organization is doing? What else can be added to these activities? etc. were various types of questions asked for the interview. The profile of managers approached varies across organisations. Some were designated as Senior Manager (HR), Assistant Manager (HR), Employee Relationship (ER) Manager, Leader-(HR) Management, Senior Manager-Learning and Organisation Development, HR Business Partner, HR Consultant, Regional Manager HR etc. The targeted HR personnel were selected across sectors including WNS Global Services, Britannia Industries Ltd., Ernst & young, HCL Technologies, IDFC FIRST Bank Pvt. Ltd., Centrient Pharmaceuticals, HAVELLS IND.LTD, PwC, Abbott Healthcare, Delhi, Brillica Services Private Limited etc. The profiles of the companies vary from business process management company to professional services offering company to health care company to banks to educational institution etc. After recording interviews, they were all transcribed and entered in MS Excel Sheet for further classification. After a thorough examination of the responses, key themes were identified, and responses were classified accordingly. A brief of the same is as given in Table 1.



Tran scripted Response from telephonic interviews (Question: What employee engagement related activities your organization is doing?)	Variable / Theme Identified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational activities • Special Events such as picnics, holiday parties, ice cream etc. on a regular interval • Social gatherings like team day out, movie nights etc. • Potlucks or Food at work. • Relax time in between works i.e., Allowed to check e mail, surf internet, talk to friends 	Fun Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor appreciates employees • Supervisor/organization welcomes new ideas. • Market standard compensation policy • Bonus/tip/rewards • Systematic financial policies • Promotional opportunities • Recognition for the contribution in the organization and on good performance • Company management is concerned for needs and wants of employees. 	Rewards and recognition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have flexible working hours in the company • Jobs are assigned on rotational basis • Flexible work schedule facility • I offer to help to another team member if he or she is overloaded. • I sometimes Work overtime to help colleague meet a deadline • There is a policy of work from home in this organization • There is a provision of rejoining the company after break i.e., after maternity or paternity leave • Given opportunity to speak up with new ideas 	Flexibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is Open and friendly work culture in this company • Skip level meeting are organized to directly interact with people working at higher level. • There is a very health manger team member relationship. • My manager works as a mentor to employees • Everyone is assigned realistic workload • Flat organizational structure is followed by the company • There is good combination of males and females working in the company • Open employee engagement forums are Organized by the company • There is transparency in the policies of the company • Employees are Involved in decision making. 	Work Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free health check-ups camps are organized by company for employees and their family members. • Work from home policy, and crèche facility for kids in my office/ organization • Extended family program where employee's family members are also invited guests. • Internal engagement includes family orientation • Work from home facility • Family members of employees are at times honored for the contribution of their spouse/ward towards the company • Holiday camps and picnics are organized by company to manage work life and personal life 	Care for family members



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job demands • Provision of constructive feedback and autonomy • Employee-customer identification and customer orientation • Influence on job resources • Problem solving skills imparted 	Job Fit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SKIP meetings • Town halls • Constructive Feedback • Organizational Survey • One on one sessions are organized • Monthly reviews • Quarterly Key Review Areas meetings • Surveys to collect feedback • Open workshop • Forum discussions • Information sharing 	Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional commitment, workplace • Spirituality • Self-esteem • Employee Satisfaction and Commitment • Conscientiousness • Self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience 	Interpersonal factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees' well-being and giving more opportunities for employees • Supportive supervisor relations • Problem solving, job complexity, leader-member exchange • Leader involvement and visibility. • Self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience • Leader involvement and visibility. 	Concern for employees

Table No 1.: List of variables identified from Telephonic interviews

Source: Compiled by authors

STAGE 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Employee engagement and related antecedents identified

Employee engagement is an emerging field of the study and considered as one of the leading factors to enhancing organizational growth and employees' performance (Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Saks, 2006). Less negative organizational behaviour is shown by Engaged employees. (e.g., intention to leave, absenteeism) at work. Engagement enables physical and emotional connect to their work, feel strongly motivated and are enthusiastic to expand and improve work-related knowledge and skills (Bakker & Bal, 2010) (Schaufeli, 2006). Engagement is also referred to as contrary to the job burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002) resulting due to lack of organizational support (Saks, 2006) or absence of any physical and psychological existence at the workplace (Kahn, 1990). Perceive Supervisory Support (Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016), (Zhong, 2016); Ability to solve problems, complexity at job, leader-member exchange (Christian, 2011); Development opportunities, recovery time

and positive workplace climate (Crawford, 2010) (Bakker & Bal, 2010); Transformational leadership (Christian, 2011) (Vincent-Hooper, Muser, & Janneck, 2012) Self-efficacy, optimism and resilience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007) etc are a few factors impacting employee engagement positively. On the other hand, Neuroticism Kim et al. (2009), Gan and Gan (2013), Woods and Sofat (2013), Turnover intention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004); administrative hassles, emotional conflict, organizational politics, resource inadequacies, role conflict, and role overload (Crawford, 2010) (Bakker & Bal, 2010) etc are negatively associated with employee engagement.

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study will be helpful for policy makers in framing policies related to engagement practices to be adopted by organisation for improved efficiency and productivity.



Fig 1: Word cloud of Employee engagement activities undertaken by companies

Source: Telephonic Interviews (compiled by author) (<https://www.wordclouds.com/>)

With respect to the interviews conducted with HR managers, it was found (Fig 2) that recreational activities at workplace such as fun activities: weekly activities, sports tournaments, yoga session, celebration of world days like twin's day celebration, women's day, Zumba classes, games, tombola, party, clubbing, get together, social outings and events are such activities which are quite popular in the organisation nowadays to engage employees. Thereafter comes engagement of employees considering their personal life and having a sense of gratitude towards those family members who have given their employees all the time and support to perform well for the company. It includes family and kids get together, scheme related to family, i.e., giving credit to family and spouse

engagements, town hall meetings, work & home life balance, employee connect and relation programs, crèche facility for working parents. Work culture is another important consideration by organisation wherein managers feel that by providing open and friendly work culture, where employees get to talk to senior people on regular basis is also going to help in engagement of employees. Good professional atmosphere, no unnecessary pressure, healthy work culture, transparent grievance redressal mechanism, open communication, is something which an employee expects from the organisation. Apart from these rewards and recognition (R&R), Compensation, Incentive schemes, are also among the key engagement parameters adopted by companies.



Fig 2: Word cloud of HR managers OPINIONS on what can be done to engage employees.

Source: Telephonic Interviews (compiled by author) (<https://www.wordclouds.com/>)

The cloud generated (Fig 3) out of interviews, states the opinions of HR managers with respect to what else employee engagement activities can be added by organisation for employees. Indoor and out door activities, gender diversity, extended family program ,sports activities, internal engagement includes family orientation , visiting to ngo, grievance redressal,

learning and challenging assignments, organize open employee engagement forums, surveys to collect feedback, open culture with an open office , flat hierarchical culture, open and transparent culture, open office, flexible work hours, work environment, feel that their work was meaningful and made a difference, feel valued, trusted and respected, feel secure and



Table 4 states the most relevant factor for employee engagement as per the frequency of its occurrence in interview as well as in literature. Most important construct found to be work culture comprising of Manager team member relationship, Work Environment, Realistic Workload, Flat hierarchical culture, emotions at work, workplace interventions etc; followed by fun activities, and career development programs. Rewards and recognition and feedback shares almost equal importance for employee engagement. Similarly, Family Care and Sense of Ownership; and Flexibility at workplace, Social Engagements of company and Interpersonal Factors such as spirituality, optimism, Self-esteem etc share same ranking.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a researcher there are always some imitations associated with the study. This study is restricted only to the qualitative aspects of employee engagement and related antecedents such identified. Therefore, this study can further be extended to empirically investigate the antecedents by conducting primary survey. Secondly the interviews undertaken is restricted to service sector only. A comparative study can be conducted qualitatively as well as quantitatively across sectors.

CONCLUSION

The organisations are increasingly concerned about the commitment level of employees towards their job and organisational goals. There is a great sense of attachment by an engaged employee towards the organisation. With the organisations and environment getting competitive day by day employees are becoming even more concerned about the extent to which organisation cares for them and about their well-being. The treatment given by the organisation or by the employer significantly impacts employees perception and it further leads to the efficient it out come by the employees. Exploring drivers associated with employee engagement organisations can have clear blueprint of what is exactly operational and what is needed to be improved in their organistaion. Which further in turn will help to build an efficinet engamnet strategy.

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