

Employee engagements a strategic initiative: An empirical study in manufacturing units

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Abstract

Employee engagement is a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success, and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being. There are differences between attitude, behaviour and outcomes in terms of engagement. An employee might feel pride and loyalty (attitude); be a great advocate of their company to clients, or go the extra mile to finish a piece of work (behaviour). Outcomes may include lower accident rates, higher productivity, fewer conflicts, more innovation, lower numbers leaving and reduced sickness rates. But we believe all three – attitudes, behaviours and outcomes – are part of the engagement story. There is a virtuous circle when the pre-conditions of engagement are met when these three aspects of engagement trigger and reinforce one another. Engaged organisations have strong and authentic values, with clear evidence of trust and fairness based on mutual respect, where two way promises and commitments – between employers and staff – are understood, and are fulfilled. Factors like effective recognition and reward system, frequent feedback, shared values and guiding principles, Positive relationships with co-workers, ensures employee engagement. An empirical study was conducted among employees of a manufacturing unit and found that employee engagement is fostered by a work environment that exhibits the characteristics that gives success.

Keywords: employee engagement, feedback, recognition, relationship with co-workers

Introduction

Employee engagement is a property of the relationship between an organization and its employees. An "engaged employee" is one who is fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work and so takes positive action to further the organization's reputation and interests.

An organization with 'high' employee engagement might therefore be expected to outperform those with 'low' employee engagement, all else being equal. In particular, engagement is two way: organisations must work to engage the employee, who in turn has a choice about the level of engagement to offer the employer. Each reinforces the other. An engaged employee experiences a blend of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and feelings of empowerment. It is a concept that is greater than the sum of its parts. Despite there being some debate about the precise meaning of employee engagement there are three things we know about it: it is measurable; it can be correlated with performance; and it varies from poor to great. Most importantly employers can do a great deal to impact on people's level of engagement. That is what makes it so important, as a tool for business success.

An engaged employee experiences a blend of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and feelings of empowerment. It is a concept that is greater than the sum of its parts. Employee engagement called worker engagement, is a business management concept. An "engaged employee" is one who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about their work, and thus will act in a way that furthers their organization's interests. According to Scarlett Surveys, "Employee Engagement is a measurable degree of an employee's positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organization which profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work". Thus

engagement is distinctively different from employee satisfaction, motivation and organizational culture.

Literature Review

One of the first challenges presented by the literature is the lack of a universal definition of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) [7] defines employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". The cognitive aspect of employee engagement concerns employees' beliefs about the organisation, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about each of those three factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organisation and its leaders. The physical aspect of employee engagement concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. Thus, according to Kahn (1990) [7], engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational role.

Most often employee engagement has been defined as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organisation (Baumruk 2004, Richman 2006 and Shaw 2005) [1, 10, 11] or the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employees in their job (Frank *et al.* 2004) [5]. Although it is acknowledged and accepted that employee engagement is a multi-faceted construct, as previously suggested by Kahn (1990) [7], Truss *et al.* (2006) [12] define employee engagement simply as 'passion for work', a psychological state which is seen to encompass the three dimensions of engagement discussed by Kahn (1990) [7], and captures the common theme running through all these definitions.

The existence of different definitions makes the state of knowledge of employee engagement difficult to determine as each study examines employee engagement under a different protocol. In addition, unless employee engagement can be universally defined and measured, it cannot be managed, nor can it be known if efforts to improve it are working (Ferguson 2007) [6]. This highlights the problems of comparability caused by differences in definition. Engagement at work was conceptualized by Kahn, (1990) [7] as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.

The second related construct to engagement in organizational behavior is the notion of flow advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) [3, 4]. Engagement is most closely associated with the existing construction of job involvement (Brown 1996) [2] and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) [4]. Job involvement is defined as _the degree to which the job situation is central to the person and his or her identity (Lawler & Hall, 1970) [9]. Kanungo (1982) [8] maintained that job involvement is a - Cognitive or belief state of Psychological identification. Job involvement is thought to depend on both need saliency and

the potential of a job to satisfy these needs. Thus job involvement results form a cognitive judgment about the needs satisfying abilities of the job. Jobs in this view are tied to one's self-image.

Objective

- To know the socio-economic profile of employees.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of employee engagement in the chosen company
- To know the attitude of employees towards their work and, organization culture and other working conditions.
- To offer suggestions for improving the effectiveness of employee engagement in the company.

Methodology

This study is an empirical research with the sample of 120 employees working in manufacturing units. Purposive simple random sampling technique was followed for the study. The respondents were administered with questionnaire and the data was obtained. Likert's 5 point scale was used to get the opinion of the respondents. The data obtained were subjected to simple percentage analysis and statistical analysis like chi square analysis.

Table 1: Sample Composition

Gender	Percent	Designation	Percent	Total Work Exp.	Percent
Male	76.7%	Junior Mgt.	59.2%	Less than 10 Years	50.0%
Female	23.3%	Middle Mgt.	40.8%	10-15 Years	23.3%
Age	Percent	Qualification	Percent	15-20 Years	26.7%
Less than 25	4.2%	Schooling	39.2%	Exp. in Present Orgn.	Percent
25- 30	32.5%	Graduate	30.8%	Less than 2	24.2%
30-35	34.2%	Post Graduate	11.7%	2-5	25.0%
35-40	21.7%	Technical	18.3%	5-10	23.3%
More than 40	7.5%			More than 10	27.5%

Analysis and Findings

Chi square tests for showing the association between gender, age, education, designation, department, total experience,

experience in present organisation versus each of the statement is tabulated below.

Table 2

S. No	Statements	Results of Chi Square Testing – Demographics versus statements						
		Gender	Age	Education	Designation	Department	Total Exp.	Exp. in Present Orgn.
1.	Employees feels nice coming to work every morning	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
2.	Managers inspire employees at work	Not Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
3.	Employees feel proud to tell people where they work	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
4.	Employees know what is expected of them at work	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
5.	Employees have the materials & equipments needed to do their work right	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Not Sig
6.	At work employees have the opportunity to do what they do best everyday	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig
7.	In the last seven days, employees have received recognition or praise for doing good work	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
8.	Supervisor or someone at work cares about employees as a person	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig
9.	There is someone at work, who encourages employees' development	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Not Sig
10.	At work opinions of employees seem to count	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
11.	The mission/purpose of the company makes employees feel their job is important	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig
12.	Employee associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Not Sig	Not Sig	Not Sig
13.	Employees have a best friend at work	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig

14.	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to employees about their progress	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
15.	In the last year, employees have had opportunity at work to learn and grow	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig
16.	The pay & benefits are comparable to similar companies	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
17.	Job promotions are fair & objectives	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
18.	The policies are clearly communicated in the organization	Not Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
19.	Employees see themselves continuing to work for organisation two years from now	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
20.	Employees are willing to give extra effort to help company succeed	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig
21.	Employees plan to continue their career with company for at least two more years	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig
22.	Employees are able to grow in the organisation	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig
23.	Employees would recommend company's products/services to a friend	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
24.	Employees would recommend employment at company to a friend	Not Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
25.	Days employees want to come to work out numbers the days they do not want to come to work	Not Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig
26.	Employees are able to maintain a reasonable balance between work & their personal life	Sig	Sig	Sig	Sig	Not Sig	Sig	Sig

Findings of the study

Employee engagement is not a Human Resources initiative that managers are reminded to do once a year. It's a key strategic initiative that drives employee performance, accomplishment, and continuous improvement all year long. It's the outcome from how your organization interacts with people to drive business results.

Employees are more likely to become truly engaged and involved in their work if the workplace provides these factors. Employee engagement can be a business strategy that focuses on finding engaged employees and then, keeping the employee engaged throughout the whole employment relationship. Employee engagement must focus on business results. Employees are most engaged when they are accountable and can see and measure the outcomes of their performance.

- Employee engagement occurs when the goals of the business are aligned with the employee's goals and how the employee spends his or her time. The glue that holds the strategic goals of the employee and the business together is frequent, effective communication that reaches and informs the employee at the level and practice of his or her job. Engaged employees have the information that they need to understand exactly and precisely how what they do at work every day affects the company's business goals and priorities. (These goals and measurements relate to the Human Resources department, but every department should have its own set of metrics.)
- Employee engagement is felt when organizations are committed to management and leadership development in performance development plans that are performance-driven and provide clear succession plans.
- Employee involvement, employee empowerment, continuous improvement, management by objectives - I am sure that you can think of many more - have all had the same fatal flaw in implementation. Most organizations implemented them as a program that was ancillary to the actual business. By thinking about employee engagement, as a planned business strategy with expected and measured

business results, perhaps it can escape the onus of just another HR program.

With this in mind, employee engagement will takes effective managers who are committed to:

- Measuring employee performance and holding employees accountable,
- Providing the communication necessary to align each employee's actions with the organization's overall business goals,
- Pursuing the employee development necessary to ensure success, and
- Making a commitment (time, tools, attention, reinforcement, training, and so forth) to keep employees engaged over the long haul because they fundamentally believe and understand that no other strategy will produce as much success – for both the business and the employees.

Additional Critical Factors to Ensure Employee Engagement

These factors also influence the willingness of employees to stay engaged and contributing.

- An effective recognition and reward system: in a recognition system that promotes employee engagement, recognition is available, frequent, and recognizes actions that are truly worthy of recognition. Effective recognition always involves verbal or written acknowledgement from the employee's manager in addition to any physical reward supplied.
- Frequent feedback: the downside of the standard employee performance appraisal is that it is a one-time deal. Effective performance feedback takes place every day, minimally, weekly for employees who need less interaction with their manager. Effective feedback focuses on what the employee is doing well and what needs improvement. It is clear and specific and reinforces the actions that the manager wants to see the employee regularly perform.

- Shared values and guiding principles: engaged employees thrive in an environment that reinforces their most deeply held values and beliefs. Employees are most successful in an organization in which their personal values are in sync with the organization's stated values and guiding principles.
- Demonstrated respect, trust, and emotional intelligence on the part of the employee's direct supervisor: managers who relate effectively with employees, who demonstrate that they are personally interested in and care about their employees, and who elicit employee input and opinions, are golden.
- Positive relationships with coworkers: engaged employees need to work, not just with nice people, but with coworkers who are equivalently engaged. Coworkers who demonstrate integrity, team work, a passion for quality and serving customers, and who are passionate about what they do at work, make ideal coworkers in a workplace that fosters employee engagement.

Thus employee engagement can be fostered only by a work environment that exhibits these characteristics.

Conclusion

This research report provides insight into global employee engagement trends over the last few years. Employees are a critical component to every organization, and their engagement serves as a barometer of organizational health. By examining employee engagement, employers can create an engagement strategy to address employee motivation, behavior, productivity and subsequent business results. With suggested actions leaders and managers can take to improve engagement levels and become better positioned for future success.

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