

Employee Engagement Key Driver for HR: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Employee engagement has become a hot topic in recent years. HR fraternity is in confusion to understand what the term is, how to implement or operationalize it in the organizational context. This literature survey examined peer-reviewed journal articles, working papers, textbooks, and other published resources relevant to employee engagement.

This research paper aims to understand the term 'employee engagement'. It summarizes a broad range of academic literature. It has given focus on the following areas: Defining Engagement, Researching Engagement and Employee Engagement in India

Focus is to identify key drivers of engagement. The review also identifies gaps and issues that have not so far been investigated, making clear the focus of where further enquiry should be. The review aims to add value to the current state of knowledge by critically evaluating the existing literature on employee engagement and providing a reflective stance on existing debates and findings. As a result, it addresses concerns about the lack of agreement on what engagement is and how issues surrounding it can be addressed.

Key Words:

Defining Engagement. Employee Engagement

Origin of the Concept

The world's top-performing organizations understand that employee engagement is a force that drives performance outcomes. In the best organizations, engagement is more than a human resources initiative -- it is a strategic foundation for the way they do business.

Research by Gallup and others shows that engaged employees are more productive. They are more profitable, more customer-focused, safer, and more likely to withstand temptations to leave. The best-performing companies know that an employee engagement improvement strategy linked to the achievement of corporate goals will help them win in the marketplace.

In this paper we are trying to explore the meaning of the term, researching on engagement and research about Indian Employees.

Employee Engagement is the extent to which workforce commitment, both emotional and intellectual, exists relative to accomplishing the work, mission, and vision of the organization. Engagement can be seen as a heightened level of ownership where each employee wants to do whatever they can for the benefit of their internal

Human Resource Management

and external customers, and for the success of the organization as a whole.

Employee engagement is also called as work engagement or worker engagement. This is a business management concept. An “engaged employee” is one who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her 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 & perform at work”. Thus engagement is distinctively different from satisfaction, motivation, culture, climate and opinion and very difficult to measure.

Employee engagement was described in the academic literature by Schmidt et al. (1993). A modernized version of job satisfaction, Schmidt et al.’s influential definition of engagement was “an employee’s involvement with, commitment to, and satisfaction with work.” This integrates the classic constructs of job satisfaction (Smith et al., 1969), and organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employee engagement is derived from studies of morale or a group’s willingness to accomplish organizational objectives which began in the 1920s. The value of morale to organizations was matured by US Army researchers during World War II to predict unity of effort and attitudinal battle-readiness before combat. In the postwar mass production society that required unity of effort in execution, (group) morale scores were used as predictors of speed, quality and militancy. With the advent of the knowledge worker and emphasis on individual talent management (stars), a term was needed to describe an individual’s emotional attachment to the organization, fellow associates and the job. The term “employee engagement” is an individual emotional phenomenon whereas morale is a group emotional phenomenon of similar characteristics. Scarlett (2001): employee engagement is the raw material of morale composed of 15 attitudinal drivers.

Defining Engagement

Kahn (1990:694) defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ themselves 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 organization, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect concerns how employees feel about each of those factors and whether they have positive or negative attitudes toward the organization 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), engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organizational role. Further, Truss et al (2006) 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), 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). This highlights the problems of comparability caused by differences in definition. Furthermore, whilst it is acknowledged that employee engagement has been defined in many different ways, it is also argued the definitions often sound similar to other better known and established constructs such as ‘organizational commitment’ and ‘organizational citizenship behavior’ (OCB) (Robinson et al 2004). Wherein Robinson defined engagement as ‘one step up from commitment’.

Researching Engagement

Further understanding of the varying levels of attachment individuals expressed towards their roles, Kahn examined several disciplines. It was found that psychologists, sociologists and group theorists had all recognized the idea that individuals are naturally hesitant about being members of ongoing groups and systems. As a result they seek to protect themselves from both isolation and engulfment by alternately pulling away from and moving towards their memberships. The terms Kahn uses to describe with two term personal engagement and personal disengagement which refer to the behavior’s by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during

work role performances. These terms developed by Kahn integrate previous ideas taken from motivation theories that people need self-expression and self-employment in their work lives. Kahn undertook a qualitative study on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement by interviewing summer camp counselors and staff at an architecture firm about their moments of engagement and disengagement at work. He defined disengagement as the decoupling of the self within the role, involving the individual withdrawing and defending themselves during role performances. Disengaged employees displayed incomplete role performances and were effortless, automatic or with no emotion. Kahn found that there were three psychological conditions related with engagement or disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. He argued that people asked themselves fundamental questions in each role situation: meaningfulness of the job to bring myself into this performance; safety and availability to complete the task. He found that workers were more engaged at work in situations that offered them more psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety, and when they were more psychologically available. It is found that meaningfulness, safety, and availability were significantly related to engagement. They also found job enrichment and role fit to be positive predictors of meaningfulness; rewarding coworker and supportive supervisor relations were positive predictors of safety, while adherence to co-worker norms and self-consciousness were negative predictors. Resources were a positive predictor of psychological availability, while participation in outside activities was a negative predictor. Overall, meaningfulness was found to have the strongest relation to different employee outcomes in terms of engagement. An alternative model of engagement comes from the 'burnout' literature, which describes job engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout, noting that burnout involves the erosion of engagement with one's job Maslach et al 2001. According to Maslach et al, six areas of work-life lead to either burnout or engagement: workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness and values. They argue that job engagement is associated with a sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work. According to Holbeche and Springett 2003, people's perceptions of 'meaning' with regard to the workplace are clearly linked to their levels of engagement and, ultimately, their performance. They argue that employees actively seek meaning through their work and, unless organizations try to provide a sense of meaning, employees are likely to quit. Further, high levels of engagement can only be achieved in workplaces where there is a shared sense of destiny and purpose that connects people at an emotional level and raises their personal aspirations. Kahn's (1990) and Maslach et al's (2001) models indicate the psychological conditions are necessary for engagement, but they do not fully explain why individuals will respond to these conditions with varying degrees of engagement.

Employee Engagement in India

Anexi Blessing :Employee Engagement Survey 2008 shows significant differences between what motivates workers in India and what motivates workers in other countries. The global survey shows that 34 per cent of the employees in India are fully engaged, 13 per cent disengaged and 29 per cent are 'almost engaged'. Factors influencing satisfaction would most influence at work for Indian workers are: Development opportunities and training (26 per cent); about how I'm doing (25 per cent); and greater clarity about what the organization needs me to do and why (22 per cent).

It is very interesting fact that though HR executives in India continue to struggle with talent management issues, particularly retention. Yet, 65.54 per cent said "yes" to continue with organization during the recession phase.

In summary: building an engaged and loyal workforce today will help for tomorrow.

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