

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

Society is passing through a great transition and transformation. There has been a drastic shift in the mindsets and attitudes of people pointing out to the need of the organization to be more knowledge-intensive than to be technology-based. People are not to be treated as costs or products or as equal with other physical resources. They are the only resources who can harness and utilize all other resources to their own advantages. Human beings are the only source of power, potentialities, knowledge, skills and competencies which can be developed and utilized for individual excellence, organizational excellence and for attainment of national or global objective. Hence, it can only be possible if they could maintain a stress-free life at home as well as in the present organization. This paper focuses on the various methods that can be practiced in organizations for engaging the employees in productive work and creating an atmosphere of cooperation and trust between them. The author based on his experience also categorizes the employees on the various levels of engagement.

Key Words : Work Engagement, Workplace Environment, Leadership, Teamwork

Introduction

Organizations, of late, have gone a step forward than only considering the employees as resources. They urge these resources to find personal meaning and motivation in their work, receive positive-interpersonal support and operate in an efficient work environment. The manifold interfaces at the work place have magnified with the complex architect of job demands and those of the human competencies have intensified the behavioural manifestation of the employee performance.

The present changing economic and business scenario widely acknowledges that stress at work is a very common problem

and that it has a very high cost in terms of employee's health, absenteeism and lower performance. Although many measures are taken to help employees to cope with stress, these may not be effective in the long term unless they go some way to analysing the etiologies of stress.

The dynamics of psychosocial environment at the workplace have been changing. These changes have in turn, generated a number of cognitive and behavioural outcomes among different groups of employees. The interface between individual attributes and organizational demands has been considered as an

important area of concern for organizational psychologists, behavioural scientists, health psychologists, sociologists and management scientists.

The emotional feelings one experiences as enjoyment, satisfaction, and pride are critical in driving important work behaviours. These feelings motivate him/her to do his/her work well, to seek ways to improve and cooperate with colleagues. When organisations mostly seek to align the business and human resources, then there has to be a dovetailing effort between employees' mental peace and mental involvement to the organizations' policies, culture and work atmosphere etc. When the occupational culture gives such supportive environment, employees are seen streamlined to maximum job satisfaction with maximum job contribution. They plan to stick around, they are happy and even proud. They are enthused and on-the-go by using their talents to make a difference in their employer's quest for sustainable business success. When such things happen, we term it as "employee engagement". Some equate employee engagement with job satisfaction, others measure it by gauging employees' emotional commitment to their organization, and often engagement and retention are used interchangeably, exploring employees' plans to stay or go.

Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.

When one feels engaged with its job, its work is enriched by excitement of challenges. Satisfaction in a job, enjoyment of relationship with others and pride in enacting its values are well felt. These positive emotions foster commitment and motivation. If the work makes oneself feel good, one will want to keep doing it. In addition when one is feeling good, one is willing to put an extra effort, do something special. One is creative and open to new solutions. The enjoyment of success can balance out the pain of failures, whether the successes are big achievements or small everyday expressions of appreciation from others. Further the studies on employee engagement as mentioned in the work of Amanda Ferguson, those of Gallup Organisations, those of ISR reports, those of SHRM Foundation Reports etc, confirms that engaged employees corresponds to employee commitment and increased productivity. Further William Griepentrog mentioned that companies with engaged employees have better productivity, improved customer satisfaction, greater profitability and lower turnover than companies whose employees are not engaged in their work.

The views of some researches propose that the hurdles faced by organizations today are over stress on power and property than honour; not having regular vigilance on employment; failure to solicit input from employees before making changes that affect their responsibilities; creativity versus punctuality; non-recognition of the relation

between control, self-esteem and productivity; Non-alignment of desire and effort with talent and methods; organisational politics, work-life imbalance. In case of the less developed markets, organisations tend to have a more close-knit family culture where management has a higher sense of social responsibility to their staff. In their attempts to retain talent professionals, companies often make the mistakes of focusing only on remuneration and promoting employees to managerial positions before they are ready. The need for employees to be in the state of "beyond satisfaction" with their jobs has been felt by the organization. Organizations believe that such employees should influence business success, higher productivity, sales, customer satisfaction and have employee retention. Such is the concept Employee Engagement.

Although Hewitt first defined employee engagement and its measurement approach in 1944, but it is of highest importance to organizations today. Employee engagement includes trust, loyalty, pride, and cooperative spirit. This also includes critical intangible assets such as trust, teamwork, and communication. Hence Engagement can be defined as a measure of the emotional and intellectual commitment that employees have to their organization. Hence, employees feel engaged when they find personal meaning and motivation in their work, receive positive interpersonal support, and operate in an efficient work environment.

However work engagement is defined as (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonxalez-Roma & Bakker, 2001) "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Absorption, is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, where by time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work".

Employee Engagement Defined

Although this term has wide connotation, but it certainly has certain has a meaning that employees find themselves meaningfully involved with the job and with the organization. As per Caterpillar employee engagement is defined as the extent to which employees express their commitment, work effort, and desire to stay in an organization. Further The Gallup Organization defines employee engagement as employees' involvement with and enthusiasm for work. Institute for

Employment Studies (IES defines employee engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee toward the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-

way relationship between employer and employee. Further Kenexa defines employee engagement as the extent, to which employees are motivated to contribute to organizational success, and are willing to apply discretionary effort (extra time, brainpower and effort) to accomplishing tasks that are important to the achievement of organizational goals.

Some Factors, Those Reflect in Engaged Employees

- Commitment, voluntary work effort and desire to stay in the organization.
- Expression of the rational commitment and emotional commitment of employees.
- Contribution of Extraordinary efforts by the employees.
- Employees' alignment of thinking, feeling and acting towards the job.
- Employees believe and enjoy what ever they do in their respective work as well as they feel valued for it.
- Employees' involvement with and enthusiasm for work.
- Employees stay, say and strive for the organization.
- Employees keep positive attitude towards their respective organizations and the organizational values.
- Employees get personal meaning and motivation in their work.
- Employees volunteer to deliver discretionary effort, i.e., extra time, brainpower and extra effort.

However I define employee engagement as "a state of urge in the employees, where they voluntarily represent as the backbone of the organization by delivering the optimum level of commitment, coupled with productivity, where they express all the intrapreneurial traits in their work, and can stand for the organization at all the time

whereby imbibing the value system of the organization, thus behaving as the citizen of the organisation" Hereby the employee is at an all time ready state.

Engagement is considered as the cumulative effects of the employee's commitment to the organization, which embarks sense of ownership and

accountability, entailing a productive workforce. Of course employee engagement requires a supportive organizational climate. Hence there exists a definite interface amongst employee commitment, organizational climate and accountability and ownership, which can stand for engaged employee. Employee engagement figures in the concept of making the employees

enthusiastic about the work. Hence can be inter-twined in the threads of passion, commitment, energy or burning desire for achievement.

These ingredients include the degree to which employees fully occupy themselves in their work, as well as the strength of their commitment to the employer and role.

Figure-1

Interface amongst Employee Commitment, Accountability & Ownership and Organization

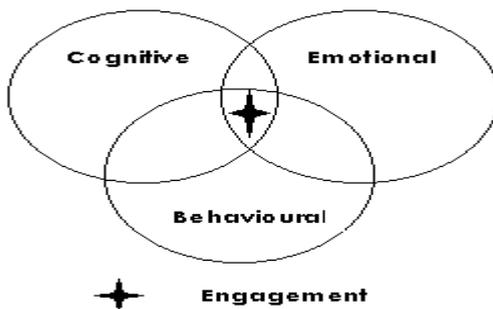
Climate; giving rise to Engaged Employee.



[Source: Article: Employee Engagement-The Psychological Perspective by Rajesh Balasubramanian]

The views of ISR Surveys reflect that engagement is the interface of the three components such as the Cognitive component or the think component, which relates to the employees logical evaluation, of company's goals and values; the second is the emotional component or the feel component or the affective component,

which taps into whether employees have a sense of belonging and pride in the company, and the third one is the behavioural component or the act component, which captures the outcomes that employees desire such as retention and willingness to "go the extra distance" for the company when necessary. Engagement itself is actually a measure of these three components.

Figure-2**Engagement as interface amongst Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioural Components**

amalgamation of commitment, loyalty, productivity and ownership. It's also a critical element of competitive advantage for most organizations.

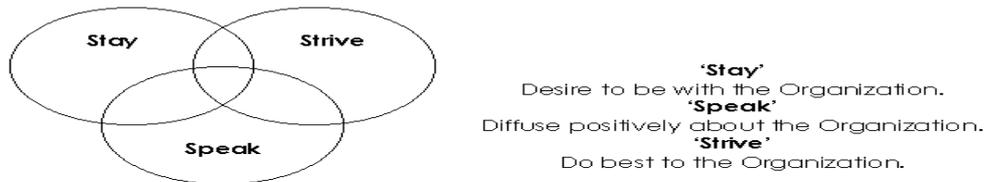
Further passion commitment and extra effort, these terms describe employee engagement-the illusive force that motivates employees to higher (or lower) levels of performance. A scan of studies and other literature related to employee engagement shows similar descriptors for this coveted energy:

- Commitment to the organization.
- Job ownership and pride.
- More discretionary effort (time and energy).
- Passion and excitement.
- Commitment to execution and the bottom line.

Positive outcomes are directly related to high levels of employee engagement. Engaged employees are those who work longer hours, try harder, accomplish more and speak positively about their organizations. Engagement is an

Gradually the transformation in the paradigm takes place where the employees contribute efforts above the level of prediction. Some assessments such as based on Lev and Schwartz Model highlight the value of employees. It is found that employees contribute to the business by leveraging its growth both financially and non-financially. The business-per-employee is magnifying at a limitless productivity. There was a situation when the performance of the organization were restricted by the limited capability and output of the employees. But now situations witness that the performance of the organization is limited by the capability of the organization to provide supportive climate to the employees. Hence the supportive climate can produce leveraged outputs. The 3S model, which further corroborates employee engagement, is represented as the interface amongst stay, speak and strive.

Figure-3
3S Model of Employee Engagement



[Nitya Naidu Tupili (2006): “HR of HR (High Rhythm of Human Resources)” HRD News Letter,

Jack Welch opined that today enterprises seek raises in productivity not incrementally but in multiples. Hence the ever-considered difficulty i.e. high level output within the quickest time frame is planned through challenged, empowered, excited and rewarded teams of people. Hence the level of engagement may be taken up, i.e. the engagement of every single mind in the organization, which can make everyone the part of the action, and allowing everyone to have a constructive voice and a contributing role in the success of the enterprise.

Employee engagement also leverages company resources for greater impact, creates opportunities for strengthening stakeholder dialogue and contributes to the development of healthy and sustainable communities. Such ideas confirm the fact that engagement has clear overlaps with commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour, but there are also differences. 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. Hence employee engagement is the mobilization by businesses of the time,

talent, energy and resources of their people to contribute to the organisation. This includes long-term sustained commitments, skills-based, short-term problem solving assignments for organizations, transfer of skills and core business competencies to employees, team-based 'challenge' projects, company sponsored projects.

An employee is said to be engaged, when the person has the passion and drive to carry out the tasks in a complementing and supporting milieu. The engaged employee shares the organisation vision and experiences the entrepreneurial feeling looking at the bigger picture. Emotionally speaking the "delaying gratification and family focused on goals-aligned to the organization makes the person engaged".

Categories Of Employee Engagement

The aspects of employee engagement as categorized employees on the various levels of engagement. It categorizes employees on their level and degree of engagement towards their respective work and employees.

The Institute of Employment Studies (IES) categorizes employees as actively engaged employees, partially engaged and passively engaged employees.

Actively engaged employees: They are fully engaged who share the vision of the organization and grows with it.

Partially engaged employees: They are fully committed to the objectives but tempted to leave upon luring.

Passively engaged employees: These are disengaged who are not committed.

Further the views of Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) states that vigor, dedication and absorption are the three categories of engagement. Where vigor and dedication are considered direct opposite of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively. The continuum that is spanned by vigor and exhaustion has been labeled energy or activation, where as the continuum that is spanned by dedication and cynicism has been labeled identification. Absorption is considered as being immersed and happily engaged in one's work.

Vigor: This refers to high levels of energy and resilience, the willingness to invest effort

in one's job, not being easily fatigued and persistence in the face of difficulties.

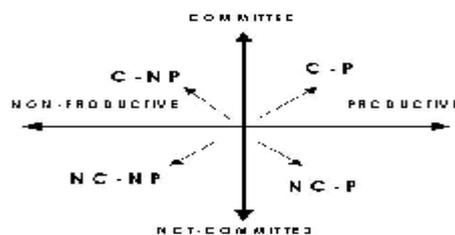
Dedication: This refers to a strong involvement in one's work, accompanied by feelings of enthusiasm and significance, and by a sense of pride and inspiration.

Absorption: This refers to a pleasant state of total immersion in one's work, which is characterized by time passing quickly and being unable to detaching oneself from the job.

The Gallup Organisation categorizes employee engagement into three categories, such as engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged. "Engaged" employees are builders. They want to know the desired expectations for their role so they can meet and exceed them. They're naturally curious about their company and their place in it. They perform at consistently high levels. They want to use their talents and strengths at work every day. They work with passion, and they have a visceral connection to their company. And they drive innovation and move their organization forward. Employees who are "not engaged" aren't necessarily negative or positive about their company. They take

Figure-4

Interface between commitment and productivity



[Model Proposed by Dr. RKS Mangesh Dash]

a wait-and-see attitude toward their job, their employer, and their coworkers. They hang back from becoming engaged, and they don't commit themselves. The "actively disengaged" employees are the "cave dwellers." They're "Consistently Against Virtually Everything." They're not just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, actively disengaged workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

Actively engaged employees: They work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

Not-engaged employees:

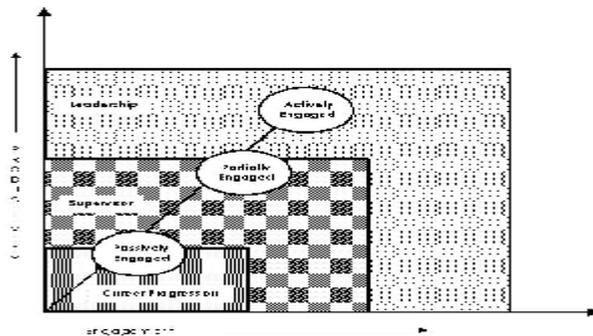
They are essentially checked out. They are sleepwalking, through their workday. They are putting in time, but not enough energy and passion into their work.

Actively disengaged: They are not just unhappy at work, but they are busy acting out their unhappiness. Everyday these employees undermine, what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

My observation confirms to a four-dimensional approach, between commitment and productivity, and represents four categories of employees, having several characteristics.

Figure-5

Interface Amongst Engagement and Productivity



[Source: Article: Employee Engagement-The Psychological Perspective by Rajesh Balasubramanian]

The quadrant represented by C-P, speaks that there are some employees who are committed as well as productive. However quadrant represented by NC-P, speaks that there are some employees who are non-committed but productive. Further the quadrant representing C-NP, speaks that there are some employees who are committed but non-productive. The

quadrant representing NC-NP, speaks that there are some employees who are non-committed as well as non-productive. Therefore a committed workforce does not mean a productive workforce. That's why the focus shifts from committed employees to engaged employees. Mr. Rajesh Balasubramanian threw light on this perspective.

The key drivers to employee engagement comprises of leadership, supervisor and career progression as depicted in figure-5. Mostly in service sector organizations the employees engaged efforts are considered as dependent variable and the organizational dynamics mostly which contributes to organizational climate are considered as independent variables.

Engagement is a complex contract that can best be presented by breaking it down into a number of individual elements. The basic idea is to make sure each of the practices is present to a "high degree" in your workplace. In turn, your employees will respond positively to employee engagement survey items. High scores correlate with better company performance. The first component is focused work, which includes the aligning efforts with strategy i.e. the employees have a clear understanding of what is expected and timely information about changes that affect their work; and empowerment i.e. the employees are given appropriate authority to make decisions and manage their own work. The second component is interpersonal support, which includes teamwork i.e. there is a high degree of

cooperation within a workgroup, and an environment of trusting and trustworthy actions that foster rapid and satisfying resolution of conflicts and collaboration i.e. there is a high degree of cooperation between workgroups that fosters common goals, rapid conflict resolution and increased trust. The third component is individual value, which includes the development plans i.e. the employees have the opportunity and support to develop on the job; support and recognition i.e. employees get ongoing feedback on performance and acceptance of individual differences of approach, ideas and opinion. The feelings or attitudes employees have toward their jobs and organizations can be measured through a set of employee survey items that correlate with multiple business outcomes. Fortunately, more and more organizations are taking this critical measurement step, and the availability of survey tools makes measuring employee engagement easier than ever before.

Thus engaging employees has been an attempt by the industries to make the employees more responsible and as true process owners.

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