The Essentials of
Employee Engagement in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the importance, need and the focus of employee engagement, and the factors enhancing employee engagement level in the organizational set up. Employee Engagement is an emerging phenomenon which should be well taken care of by the managers in the present scenario of business environment. The managers have to be keen whether employees are engaged or disengaged in their work setting, since disengagement or alienation can be the central problem of workers for their lack of commitment and motivation. Meaningless work is often associated with apathy and detachment from ones works. In such conditions, individuals are thought to be estranged from their selves. Other Research using a different resource of engagement (involvement and enthusiasm) has linked it to such variables as employee turnover, customer satisfaction – loyalty, safety and to a lesser degree, productivity and profitability criteria. Engagement is linked to three essential forces in the organization - attrition, productivity & profitability. Ultimately the productivity is what is expected by the company from employees. An engaged employee carry out what is expected of him, having his focus and goal clear and brings success to the organization. Profitability is the result of actively engaged work force. What company look for are committed and sincere employees who can perform their job efficiently with all role clarity.

Here this paper throws light on the essentials of employee engagement, how shared visions enhance engagement level and the steps to be taken by a firm to build engagement.

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Introduction

Since the organizational success has been well predicted and understood by the study of the employee engagement, it is very vital to study the essentials of employee engagement. Research has shown that when engagement scores are high, employees are more satisfied, they are less likely to leave the organization, and more productive. Many studies have shown that investments in people (i.e., HR-related practices) have a reliable impact on the performance of organizations. The Bureau of Labour conducted a comprehensive review of more than 100 studies and found that people practices have significant relationships to improvements in productivity, satisfaction, and financial performance. Each organization is different and there are many factors that affect bottom-line outcomes; however, engagement scores can serve as meaningful predictors of long-term success. Some organizations use engagement scores as lead measures in their HR scorecards. When an organization can show the relationship between engagement scores and bottom-line outcomes, everyone pays attention to the engagement index. Establishing this critical link between people and performance helps HR professionals prove that people-related interventions are a worthwhile investment.

The Need and Objective of Engagement

Current studies show that organizations are focusing as to how to make employees more engaged. Employees feel engaged when they find personal meaning and motivation in their work, receive positive interpersonal support, and operate in an efficient work environment. What brought engagement to the forefront and why is everyone interested in it? Most likely, the tight economy has refocused attention on maximizing employee output and making the most of organizational resources. When organizations focus attention on their people, they are making an investment in their most important resource. You can cut all the costs you want, but if you neglect your people, cutting costs won't make much of a difference. Engagement is all about getting employees to "give it their all." Some of the most successful organizations are known for their unique work environments in which employees are motivated to do their very best. These great places to work have been recognized in such lists as Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For.

The concept of engagement is a natural evolution of past research on high-involvement, empowerment, job motivation, organizational commitment, and trust. All of these research streams focus on the perceptions and attitudes of employees about the work environment. In some ways, there are variations on the same fundamental issue. What predicts employees "giving their all?" Obviously, all organizations want their employees to be engaged in their work. IES

defines engagement as: 'A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation 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 organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.' Engagement was conceptualized by Kahn, (1990) 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. Employee engagement is thus the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organizations 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 organization. The organization must work to develop and nature engagement, which requires two-way relationship between employer and employee.' Thus employee engagement is a barometer that determines the association of a person with the organization.

The Essence of Engagement

- A positive attitude towards, and pride in, the organization
- Belief in the organization's products/services
- A perception that the organization enables the employee to perform well

4. A willingness to behave altruistically and be a good team player

5. An understanding of the bigger picture and a willingness to go beyond the requirements of the job.

Shared Vision Enhances Employee Engagement

Often organizations fail to use the talent available to them to the fullest extent. This is mainly because they fall short of creating a work culture that stimulates people to give their best.

In order to unlock the human potential that is present in a latent state in the organization, the top leadership must make efforts to engage people not just with their minds but with their hearts as well. Shared vision and shared values play a key role in creating intellectual and emotional engagement in people.

Working trends

Vision statements and values do exist in most of the organizations. But care is not taken to explain these to everybody in the organization. Truly great organizations however realize the importance of sharing the vision and values with their people. In fact this is a key factor that underpins their success. They often take great pains to make people understand the direction in which the organization is going, what it want to achieve and why. They

also let their people realize how they can meaningfully contribute towards those goals. Employee engagement is crucial to achieve high productivity and profitability. Without engagement organizations cannot hope to retain their best talent. But employee engagement is not something that remains stable at a particular level. It keeps fluctuating because several factors influence it. Only the organizations that do business both successfully and meaningfully can hope to maintain it at a high level.

Employee's emotional bonding with the organization often determines how hard they are willing to work and hope long they intend to stay with it. Emotional engagement of employees can be best achieved through alignment of social values.

Research indicates that more employees today seek to work meaningfully and contribute in some way to the society. This implies that organizations should not only have a sound economic mission that endeavours to produce financial benefits to the employees, it should also have social goals that inspire its people to serve the community in an important manner.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility initiatives often get positive response from the employees. While creation and communication of values and vision has a big impact on the development of employee engagement, another key factor that helps to sustain it is alignment of leadership behaviors with these values. To gain employee trust and engagement organizations should see that their leader behaviours match with written values and vision statements and the communications around them.

It is important for leaders to walk the talk. They should establish trust through the organizations on the basis of their personal creditability and integrity. In recent times there have been several instances where leaders have acted questionably in organizations across the globe. This has an adverse impact on employee trust level and also severely damages their engagement. Good companies take measures to continuously enhance the engagement and commitment level of their employees. They frequently take their pulse of employees by asking them if they understand the company mission and perceive how their individual roles fit into the overall big picture. They also try to find out if their employees care to take action when needed and if they know how to handle difficult situations. They gather information on what the employees like most about the organization and what values they would like to uphold. Good companies also do regular surveys to find out how their organizations top leadership is faring. They give importance to strong business ethics. Through 360-degree

feedbacks and systems, they monitor the leadership behaviours and adherence to ethical, social and business values. Shared vision and shared values help the leadership and employees of an organization to focus on the company's strategic goals and also learn the way they are expected to work to reach those goals. When employee and organizational values match, talent utilization soars to a new high.

Engagement Challenges

- Engagement levels decline as employees get older – until they reach the oldest group (60 plus), where levels suddenly rise, and show this oldest group to be the most engaged of all

- Minority ethnic respondents have higher engagement levels than their white colleagues

- managers and professionals tend to have higher engagement levels than their colleagues in supporting roles, although people in the latter group appear to owe greater loyalty to their profession than to the organisation in which they practice their craft

- Engagement levels decline as length of service increases

- having an accident or an injury at work or experiencing harassment (particularly if the manager is the source of the harassment)

both have a big negative impact on engagement

- Employees who have a personal development plan, and who have received a formal performance appraisal within the past year, have significantly higher engagement levels than those who have not.

Building Blocks of Job Engagement

- Good quality line management

- Two-way communication

- Effective internal co-operation

- A development focus

- Commitment to employee wellbeing

- Clear, accessible HR policies and practices, to which managers at all levels are committed

Driving Forces of Engagement

Research shows that committed employees perform better. If we accept that engagement, as many believe, is 'one step up' from commitment, it is clearly in the organisation's interests to understand the drivers of engagement. Study data indicates that opinions about, and experiences of, many aspects of working life are strongly correlated with engagement levels. However, the strongest driver of all is a sense of feeling valued and involved. This has several key components

- Involvement in decision making

- The extent to which employees feel able to voice their ideas, and managers listen to these views, and value employees contribution

- The opportunities employees have to develop in their jobs

- The extent to which the organization is concerned for employees' health and wellbeing

Key Measures to Control Employee Disengagement

- Offer challenging, meaningful, assignments to the employees.

- Provide scope for advancements.

- Communicate clear vision and direction.

- Recognize your employees and their performance output and motivate.

- Exhibit team spirit

- Maintain credibility and high ethical standards.

- Believe your people and they will believe you.

Leadership Qualities Building Employee Engagemnet

These leaders who would like to build employee engagement try to lift the fellow employees of the organization, being an example in everything they do. They are always transparent people, doing everything in complete transparency whereby other employees are able to believe and put their trust in them. These leaders are able to exhibit the spirit of endurance, patience, longsuffering and temperance in everything they do and are able to convince others in their decision making. Of course these are the qualities of good leadership as well. They will not show their suspicion on employees and they strongly believe that employees are normal people, having normal ambition to achieve maximum output in organization. These leaders will be able to see talents and potential hidden in each employee and bring them out by careful nurturing. No wonder, these types of leaders will emerge out as great personalities and they give least time to see the weakness of their employees. They are great motivators of people around them. Such people will boost employee morale and employee engagement. They are able to exercise leadership skills, being able to counsel employees strategically with regard to employee's personal, family and work related problems. They would try to provide comfortable working environment, improving the quality of work-life of employees through participation and other means.

Employee Engagement is a Crucial role of Leadership Priority

The companies that do not address the employee's insecurity are likely to be surprised to see the

destructive consequences. One of the crucial leadership questions today is how to improve the employee engagement within the companies when there are disquieting developments rising recently. It is fact that there are good policies in the employee manuals. But the management capability to engage the workforce and to implement the policies practically seems quiet opposite. This is true because the management looks at tangent focussing on corporate benefit alone.

Job description failure is one of the popular reasons behind wrong hires, work over load and high employee turnover. Bad job descriptions show up in many forms. For example, a job description for the role of an editor goes like 'should have excellent return and verbal communication skills, good grasp of medical/pharmaceutical sciences, ability to check the consistency for fonts and page breaks' here the description is more about the required skill set rather than the responsibilities of the role. Another example is 'keep the company's user records database fast, consistent and reliable'

Prevention of injustice is very different from pursuit of perfect justice. They are two sides of the same coin, but their value perception is different. So far as the Indian legislative frame work is concerned, laws pertaining to worker relations have for long needed to be updated. Labour reforms have been widely discussed, but the subject remains on the pending agenda.

Evidence of pressure: consider the evidence that employees do suffer from a feeling of unfair treatment, resulting in desperation and depression among employees of both developed and emerging markets.

Well- known French companies such as franch telecom, Renault, Peugeot have experienced increasing suicides among workers in the last two years. The cynic may observe that the French suicide rate is generally high compared to Britain, Germany, and the US. That is true. However, even in us, the rate of suicides has increased by 28% in the last two years.

Employees feel that they are expected to offer loyalty to their employer, but they do not receive an equal commitment from the employer to protect their jobs. Managers are so focused on corporate survival that they seem to have a limited bandwidth to attend to the employees feeling of injustice. Employees everywhere say that they are 'in distress' or that they are 'stressed out'.

It is imperative that there should be complete transparency between employees and the Management. Employees should feel that they are not under security threat and they must be able to trust the employer through and through and this is possible only when employer exercises honesty, integrity, transparency in all their dealings apart from the good policy manuals. Sometimes the decisions taken by the management can be one-sided focussing on the corporate benefit alone.

Surveys in the US over the last few years show that indices like loyalty and trust have collapsed from the 80% levels to 30% levels. More than half the respondents feel a sense of stagnation and disinterest in their work. The recession has increased uncertainty simultaneously with a perceived 'onslaught' by managers to increase workforce productivity.

All in all, in the developed countries permanent workers are unhappy and are disenchanted with both their work and their employer's attitude. Temporary workers too, have their own grievances. In South Korea, industrial action by temporaries has been experienced at Ssangyong and Don Ghee. In Japan, the president of Rengo has stated his disapproval of "temporaries being treated the same as robots".

In India too, we have witnessed hyper cases of industrial action recently. After many decades of relative labour tranquillity, company executives have been killed at Grazino in the north and Pricol in the south. Strikes have occured at gurgaon-manesar, Chennai and Coimbatore.

Employees in the emerging markets are deeply concerned about inflation, food and security. Prices of essential commodities have already increased supply. Food experts predict that the rise in food prices is only the beginning of a serious, new threat. Richard Henry, chief economist at IFC'S agribusiness department, believes that "last years food crisis was a fairly small one- and was cut short by the global financial crisis- the next one is bound to be more prolonged". In emerging countries, such forecasts cause very deep concerns.

Universally, employees are a worried lot. All of these are alarming trends and need to be taken seriously. Solutions must be found and implemented at the firm level. Within the firm, it must be focused upon at the departmental level and at the level of the individual relationship. Employees feel engaged or disengaged at the transactional level within departments.

A firm approach: Managers must Consider a Four-Pronged Approach

- The subject of employee engagement needs to be driven down the company by the CEO. There is a general lack of awareness of the problem down the line. It is also mixed up with the general economic downturn. Poor employee engagement, it must be clearly understood, is a precursor to some other problem which is brewing. That is why there needs to be top-level engagement. If enough employees feel disengaged, the consequences will certainly be disruptive. Operating managers have to act. It cannot be left to the HR department.

- There must be the action to measure and track employee engagement. Techniques are

available and excellent companies already track their employee engagement scores. However the extent to which such companies act on the results is unclear. Further, it is suspected that very few companies measure employee engagement and prefer to get a qualitative feel; so their agenda to respond is also too general. The general approach may have worked in the past, but will not be good enough for the future.

3. Operating managers need a refresher training on empathy and listening skills. Unions have been quiet for over two decades now with the passing of labour leaders like Data Samant and Kuchelar. A whole new generation of managers has taken leadership roles without any direct experience of dealing with employee discontent. Listening skills are difficult to develop especially when manager's career thus far has not required him to do much of it. There need to be powerful conversations at the operating level, where employees feel they have been listened to even if all their suggestions have not been accepted.

4. And last, the top leadership of the company must institutionalise ways to connect directly with the lower levels of employees. Many Tata companies practice a monthly dialogue or two way webcast. Many formal and informal models of listening downwards have been practised. These need to be brushed up and implemented earnestly.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that achieving an engaged workforce may take some time, but managers do have many tools to help them get there. Employees are more satisfied when they believe they are responsible for identifying and satisfying the needs of the management and the customers they serve, and when they believe the organization has the best interests for employees and its customers on their mind. Once employee satisfaction is achieved, managers will find knowing employee engagement is close at hand. Both satisfaction and engagement have direct effects on organization's performance. The key drivers of employee engagement are reduced role conflict, training, autonomy, and personal power. Armed with this knowledge, each organization must identify the most relevant and task-oriented tools to specifically address role conflict, training, and more. Employee Engagement is the buzz word term for employee communication. It is a positive attitude held by the employees towards the organization and its values. It is rapidly gaining popularity, use and importance in the workplace and impacts organizations in many ways. Employee engagement emphasizes the importance of employee communication on the success of a business. An organization should thus recognize employees, more than any other variable, as powerful contributors to a company's competitive position. Therefore employee

engagement should be a continuous process of learning, improvement, measurement and action. We would hence conclude that raising and maintaining employee engagement lies in the hands of an organization and requires a perfect blend of time, effort, commitment and investment to craft a successful endeavour.

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