

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT : AN OVERVIEW

Dipti Kanwar, Research Scholar at JECRC University, Jaipur, Rajasthan)

kanwar.dipti@gmail.com Guide : Dr. Pooja Sharma (Assistant Professor, Management)

Abstract

The concept of employee engagement is in existence since 1990, when the term was used for the first time. Employee Engagement is emerging as a new dimension of HR; it is relatively a new term in HR literature. A great deal of interest has been shown in Employee Engagement in recent years. Employee engagement is a multidimensional concept taking in two way interaction between the employers and employees of an organization. As a matter of fact, employee engagement has emerged as a notable need for businesses. Employee engagement is important for any employer which aims to retain its valued employees as an employer's capability to manage employee engagement is related to its ability to achieve enhanced business gains and high level of performance.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The concept of employee engagement is in existence since 1990, when the term was used for the first time. The term earned importance from the year 2000 onwards. A great deal of interest has been shown in Employee Engagement in recent years.¹

Understanding the fact that an organization can gain competitive advantage through people facilitated the concept to gain popularity. According to the late management guru, Peter Drucker, the most influential and important five letter word begins with P, which stands for people.² The most potent source of competitive advantage for an organization is undoubtedly people. Believing in the same, K G Mohan, General Manager Operations and Location, Wipro, Kolkata argued that, "Employee engagement is about treating employees as people, not merely as employees".³

A number of researchers have claimed that employee engagement predicts profitability, financial gains, enhanced performance, and organizational success⁴; whereas Hewitt associates indicate that they "have established a conclusive, compelling relationship between engagement and profitability through higher productivity, sales, and customer satisfaction".⁵

An organization that unlocks the secrets of employee engagement is promised profits beyond its wildest dreams.⁶ Some common statements regarding employee engagement emerge including employees' satisfaction and respect and pride in their employer. Employees' go the extra mile and deliver excellent results in terms of performance when employee engagement is greater.⁷

One of the world's finest organizations Gallup consulting also comprehends that it is employee engagement which acts as a force that drives business outcomes. An engaged employee is more productive, customer focused, profitable and is more likely to stay with the organization. Also, in best organizations, employee engagement is the way they do business, in such organizations employee engagement excels a human resources initiative.⁸

Engaging employees is the need of the hour but the biggest challenge today is fully engaging the talented people and capturing their minds at each phase of their work lives. In today's competitive environment, employee engagement has emerged as an important driver of business success and it can be a deciding factor in organizational success. Engagement is a key link to an organization's reputation, employee retention, loyalty, productivity, stakeholder value and ultimately customer satisfaction.⁹

Researches and studies on Employee engagement have been carried out in a number of countries including India. The workforce of each country exhibits certain characters and is different in certain ways. Study conducted by HRAnexi and BlessingWhite, highlighted that there are significant differences between what motivates Indian workers and workers of other countries. In Indian context, several studies of Employee Engagement levels have concluded that the Indian workforce is more focused and they help the organization achieve its goal through their performance. Understanding the specific factors influencing the engagement levels of the Indian workforce will be important to any Indian organization looking to positively influence the productivity of its workforce. As per the report, workforce in India likes remuneration inflation and upbeat job market, which has a straight impact on employee's decisions to stay or leave the organization and their expectations.¹⁰

Pamela and JoAnn cited that employee engagement is been talked and written about widely in the management literature. The term is been defined and discussed in Harvard Business Review (2005), Workforce Magazine (2005), and the Washington Post (2005). Also, the term has shown up on a number of websites of human resources consulting including DDI (2005), Towers Perrin (2003) and CIPD (2006).¹¹

As mentioned above, it appears that engagement is a multidimensional concept taking in two way interaction between the employers and employees of an organization. As a matter of fact, employee engagement has emerged as a notable need for businesses.

Evolution of the Concept

The evolution of employee engagement is believed to be embedded in work on employee Organizational Commitment (OC) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). The concept of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour in connection with engagement is important but engagement is all about aligning an individual's performance with the goals of an organization. It is about going the extra mile, putting discretionary effort, and wanting to deliver results in the favor of his/her organization.¹

Robinson et al. argued that employee engagement has become a widely used and popular term but its definition sounds like established and well known concepts like organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and organizational commitment (OC). Also, the researchers argued that even though employee engagement takes in elements of OC and OCB but doesn't go perfectly with either. Furthermore, the concepts do not reflect aspects of engagement sufficiently including the level to which engaged employees are expected to have awareness of the business.¹²

Apart from OC and OCB, employee engagement is also linked with job involvement. However, May et al. argued that engagement is different from job involvement. Job involvement is related to the need satisfying abilities of the job and is attached to one's self-image whereas engagement is all about how employees utilize themselves in the performance of their jobs including dynamic use of behaviors and emotions in addition to cognitions.¹³

Saks also stated that engagement is different from organizational commitment as it refers to an individual's attitude and bonding with his/her organization. Engagement on one hand is all about one's performance formally rather than voluntary behavior on the other hand in OCB. It is the extent to which employees are absorbed in performing their organizational roles.

Further Saks commented that, engagement is different from several related terms especially organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, and job involvement rather it is a unique construct mainly associated with individual organizational role performance.¹⁴

Defining Employee Engagement

Organizations all over the globe have defined engagement differently.¹⁵ There exist different definitions of employee engagement and each study observes employee engagement under a different protocol. Therefore, employee engagement appears as yet another trend in human resource management or what some might call "old wine in a new bottle". Robinson et al argued that the definitions given by researchers often appear similar to other concepts such as 'organizational citizenship behaviour' (OCB) and 'organizational commitment'. He defined engagement as 'one step up from commitment'.¹⁶

The definition of employee engagement is given by a number of renowned researchers and organizations.

Employee engagement is defined as ‘being positively present during the performance of work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others.’¹⁷

The Corporate Executive Board of US looks at engagement as “the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment”.¹⁸ The Global Workforce Study, largest of its kind, identified engagement as employees’ willingness and ability to contribute to organization success. The study also recognized the drivers of engagement, retention and attraction through the eyes of employees.¹⁹

Employee engagement refers to Staff commitment and a sense of belonging to the organization.²⁰ For Hay Group, Employee engagement is ‘a result achieved by stimulating employees’ enthusiasm for their work and directing it toward organizational success’.²¹ The Institute for Employment studies (IES) defines employee engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values.¹²

Kevin Kruse looks at Employee engagement as the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals.²²

Right management defines engagement using four definitive factors, first factor is commitment to the job and organization, second factor is pride in the job and in the organization, third factor is about the willingness to advocate the benefits and advantages of the job and organization and the fourth factor is about satisfaction with the job and organization.²³

Rothwell argued that there is no standard definition of employee engagement but the common agreement on the definition of employee engagement involves a workplace in which workers:

- Feel connected to their organization emotionally
- Take proud in advocating it as a good place to work to other people
- Get more than just wage or salary from working there and are attached to the intrinsic rewards they gain from being with the organization, and
- Feel attached to the principles, ethics and actions embodied by the organization.²⁴

As per Dell Inc., “To compete today, organizations need to win over the minds (rational commitment) and the hearts (emotional commitment) of employees in ways that lead to extraordinary efforts”.⁷

Though many renowned authors have defined the term employee engagement but the researcher's understanding of the concept says that it is the willingness of an employee to go the extra mile to make its customers satisfied and let its organization taste success in terms of gaining competitive advantage and reaping financial gains.

CHAPTER 2

Importance of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is important for any employer which aims to retain its valued employees as an employer's capability to manage employee engagement is related to its ability to achieve enhanced business gains and high level of performance.³²

It is very important to understand the value of an engaged employee as employee engagement indicates the intention of an employee to stay with an organization. Also, workplaces with high levels of engagement indicate profitability, satisfied customers, and financial gains.³³

Employee engagement is critical because when the levels of engagement in organizations starts to decline, organizations become vulnerable to lower levels of customer satisfaction, higher rates of turnover and absenteeism and reduced productivity.³⁴

Engagement is also a significant contributor to profitability, productivity and performance whereas disengagement results in low profits and reduced performance. It is the efficiency of an individual which affects the overall productivity of an organization resulting in sustainability and enhanced financial productivity.³⁵

In order to retain the top performing employees, it is very important to adopt engaging strategies. Top performing employees are like other employees in many ways but there are certain differences in the way they do things and what they expect from their leaders/managers, their job and working environment. ³⁶

Looking at the importance of engagement, organizations of all types and sizes invest significantly in practices that enhance commitment and engagement among their employees.³⁷

CHAPTER 3

Drivers of Engagement

Today employee engagement and loyalty are critical than ever before to an organization's success and to gain competitive advantage. The greatest rewards for an organization are earned by employees. Manpower is the biggest investment for any business. It is required to consider employees one step up from just assets and to engage them. Engagement is basically a long term process which begins with good communication between employees, co-workers and employer

to encourage better working environment.²⁵

An organization is also responsible for creating conditions which truly engage the employees. Employee engagement is the “key to building a sustainable high performance organization”. To achieve the same, an organization requires to determine whether an individual will be engaged or not with several factors operating in interaction with one another.³⁸

A number of researches have highlighted that committed employees perform better. The Institute for Employment Studies argues that engagement is one step up from commitment, and if it is believed to be ‘one step up’ from commitment, then it is clearly in the organization’s interests to understand the drivers of engagement. The research also cited that many aspects of working life are interrelated with engagement levels. But, the strongest driver of all is a sense of feeling valued and involved.

As per IES there are a number of components that drive engagement:

- The most powerful driver is considered to be involvement in decision making.
- The degree to which employees have the freedom to voice their ideas, and that their views are listened by the managers and value employees’ contributions.
- Another component takes in the opportunities employees have to widen their jobs.
- The extent to which the organization is concerned for its employees’ personal health and wellbeing.

The IES findings suggest that regardless of sector, many of the drivers of engagement will be common to all organizations. However, some variability is likely to be present but the relative strength of each driver is expected to be dependent upon the organization being studied.¹²

In order to capture the hearts, heads and hands of employees, there are certain avenues which call for action. The same were identified by Dan Crim and Gerard Seijts and were summarized as the Ten C’s of employee engagement.

The ten C’s which when taken care of help in achieving employee engagement are discussed as follows:

1. **Connect:** It is about valuing the employees.
2. **Career:** It is about fostering one’s career growth.
3. **Clarity:** It is about getting understanding of the vision and goals of the organization.
4. **Convey:** Managers are required to provide regular feedback to the employees about their performance.

5. **Congratulate:** It is about recognizing and praising good performance of the employees.
6. **Contribute:** Good leaders must help employees to understand one's contribution to the organization.
7. **Control:** It is all about enabling the employees to actively participate in decision making.
8. **Collaborate:** Collaboration refers to cooperation among the employees when they work as a team.
9. **Credibility:** Credibility refers to demonstration of transparency and high ethical standards.
10. **Confidence:** It is about creating a sense of positive identification among the employees.

Great organizations are set apart from merely good one on the basis of levels of employee engagement. To achieve engagement, leaders of an organization play an important. It is the leader who should identify the level of engagement in their organization, find out the reason of lack of full engagement and also should try to find out solutions for the lack of engagement as employee engagement makes a real difference.³⁷

Leaders are able to create the conditions that foster employee engagement only when they get the understanding of the factors which derive employee engagement in an organization.³⁹

The drivers of engagement are identified by a number of researchers and organizations. However, there is no one frame which fits all the organizations as the drivers vary from organization to organization depending on certain organizational factors like the size of the organization, number of employees, organizational strategies and policies.

CHAPTER 4

Models of Engagement

A number of engagement models are being proposed by researchers including models illustrating drivers of engagement (Robinson et al, Alfes et al, Aon Hewitt), employee engagement model (CIPD), model of hierarchy of engagement (Penna), model of organizational dynamics in the public sector (Schmidt) and model of employee communication (Reserve Bank of Canada).

There are many organizational and individual and factors that determine whether employees are engaged or not. If they are engaged, then to what extent they are engaged and if they are disengaged, what could be the reason behind the lack of engagement. This section put forward the models that illustrate the factors leading to engagement.¹

Institute for Employment Studies (IES) model of drivers of engagement

One of the notable models of engagement has been put forward by the Institute of Employment

(IES). IES proposed model of drivers of engagement based on an attitude survey conducted on fourteen organizations. IES refers to the model as a diagnostic tool which can be used to derive organization-specific drivers.

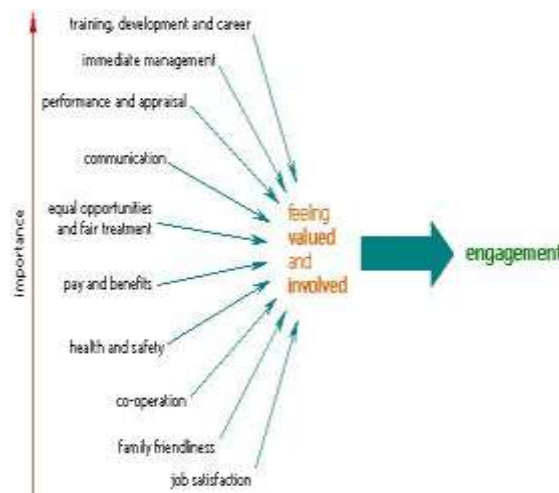


Figure 5.1: Showing drivers of employee engagement as identified by Institute of Employment Studies (IES) 2003.

The findings of the IES study suggest that regardless of the sector, many drivers will be common to almost all organizations. However, some variability is likely to be dependent upon the type of organization studied.¹⁵

4.2. Three dimensional model of Engagement by Jonnie De Lacy

De Lacy, (2009) also proposed a three dimensional model of engagement in which people can be cognitively, affectively and behaviorally engaged. The three dimensional model given by Lacy (2009), takes opinion of behavioural engagement from Macey and Schneider’s model (2008).⁴⁰

The three dimensions as identified and described by Lacy are:

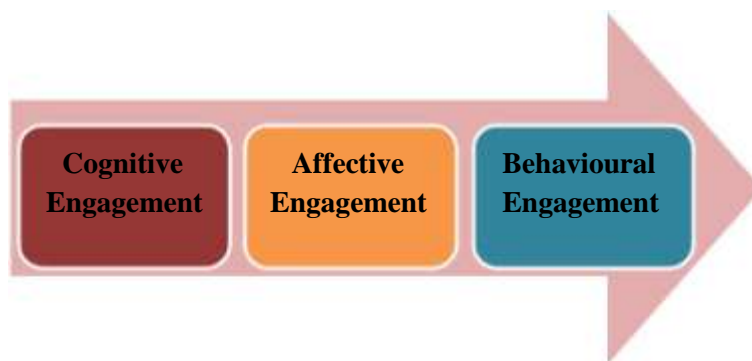


Figure 5.2: Three Dimensional Construct of engagement

Cognitive Engagement:

According to Lacy (2009), cognitive engagement is role and goal clarity.

Affective Engagement:

Lacy (2009) considered affective engagement as a distinct construct, a construct different from job involvement, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Behavioural Engagement:

Lacy (2009) argued that behavioural engagement is important as it is of direct benefit to organizations.

4.3. Aon Hewitt's employee engagement model and engagement drivers' model

Aon Hewitt defines employee engagement as the state of intellectual and emotional involvement that encourages the employees to work in the best manner. As per Aon, engagement is an individual's behavioural and psychological state and an engaged employee consistently exhibit three general behaviors as the three S, **Say**, **Stay** and **Strive**.

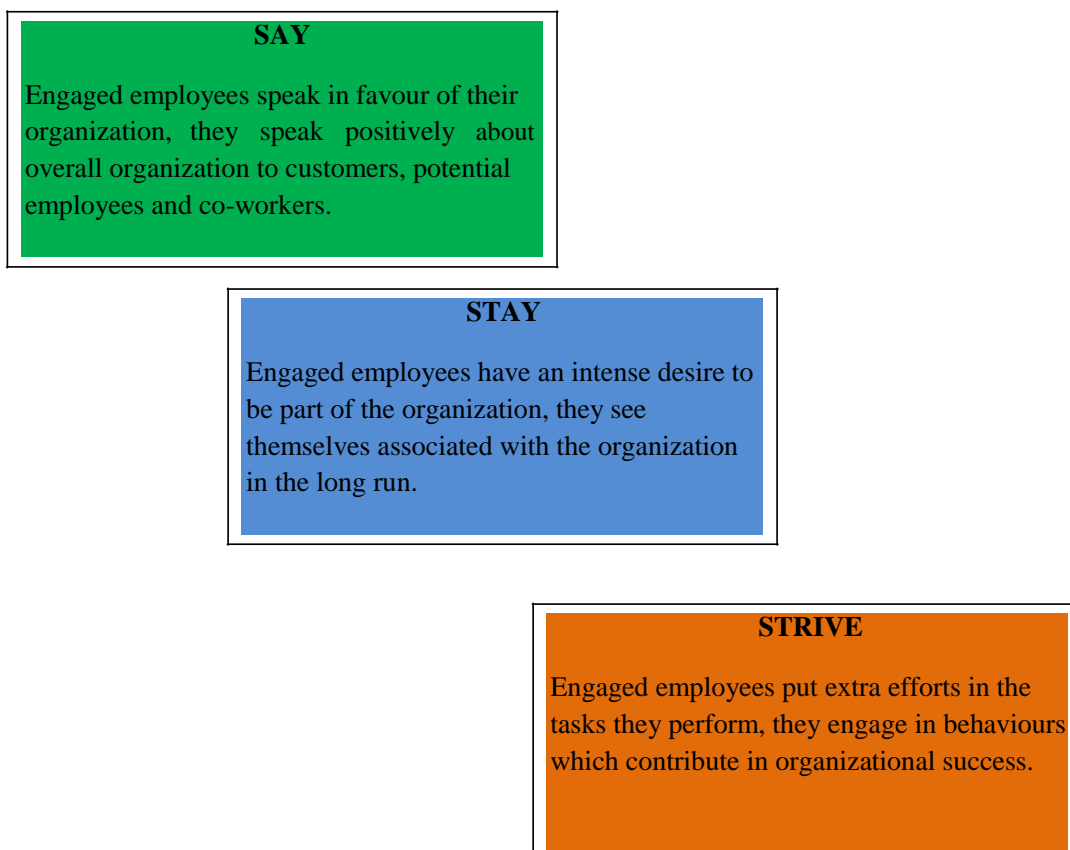


Figure 5.3: Aon Hewitt's Employee Engagement Model

4.4. Model of engagement driver as proposed by Alfes et. al

Alfes et.al (2010) also introduced an engagement model after identifying the drivers which leads to engagement. According to them there are certain drivers of engagement which are of great importance. The drivers as suggested by them are:

- Meaningfulness of work
- Being able to voice views upward
- Senior management communication and vision
- Supportive work environment
- Person-job fit
- Line management style

The strongest driver of engagement is meaningfulness i.e. creating meaning for employees in their work is the most important driver of engagement.



Figure 4.4: Engagement model given by Alfes et.al.

CHAPTER 5

Benefits of Employee Engagement

Engagement is a two way process between an employer and an employee. The employer attempts to engage employees who return a level of engagement. Employee engagement is beneficial for an organization as engaged employees may be the difference between surviving and thriving when business needs to either more or less.

The benefits of employee engaged are being observed by a number of researchers based on practical findings. According to Right Management, engaged workforce portray certain characters like:

- Engaged employee are satisfied with their current job and their organization.
- Engaged employees are committed to make the job and the organization successful
- Engaged employees are proud of the work they do and of their organization.
- Engaged employees talk positively about their job and organization.²³

Nitin Vazirani also identified advantages of having engaged employees as:

- Engaged employees like to stay with the organization.
- Advocates of the products and services of the organization they work for.
- Engaged employees are more motivated and they better perform.
- There is a noteworthy link between profitability of an organization and employee engagement.
- Engaged employees build an emotional bond with the organization which in turn affects their attitude towards clients of the organization and thereby improves service levels.
- Engaged employees contribute in improving customer satisfaction levels.
- Engagement builds alignment with the organizational goals and strategies.
- More passionate and committed workforce.
- Creates a sense of loyalty and trust in the organization.
- Engaged employees act as effective brand ambassadors of the organization.
- Engagement helps in enhancing business growth.³²

According to Bijaya Kumar employee engagement is a driver of organizational effectiveness and for individual and organizational success, it acts as a critical ingredient. Also, there is a

significant link between employee engagement as an individual level construct and business results.⁴⁶

A highly engaged employee is consistent in performance and also delivers beyond expectations.

The impact of engagement is noticeable through:

- Organizational performance
- Organizational culture
- Productivity
- The rate of employee retention
- Outcomes for the customers of the organization (customer satisfaction)
- Encouragement of the organizations external image.⁴⁷

Nancy Lockwood also mentioned the benefits of having engaged employees as:

- An important driver for organizational success
- Retention of talent
- Improves organizational performance
- Fosters customer loyalty
- An important link to overall stakeholder value and, customer satisfaction and organization reputation.⁹

As per Hewitt associates, engaged employees are less likely to leave their organization. In fact they contribute more and are loyal too. Also, there is a conclusive relationship between engagement and customer satisfaction, sales and profitability through higher productivity and employee retention.⁵

Vital links between employee engagement, profitability, customer loyalty, business growth, retention of staff and employee engagement were found by the Gallup organization³³. Employee engagement helps in predicting organizational success, individual employee outcomes and financial performance. Moreover as per Kahn, it leads to,

- Positive outcomes for individuals for example the experience and quality of work done by people.
- Positive organizational-level outcomes for example the productivity and growth of an organization.⁴⁶

Engaged employees are linked with enhanced performance, greater profits, increased financial

gains, increased productivity and ultimately with overall organizational performance.

Conclusion

Based on the thoughtful study of the researches being conducted with employee engagement at the centre, the researcher concludes that it is emerging as an important HR concept. Employee engagement is soon going to become one of the prime HR function.

The researchers understanding of the concept says that it is related to employee's attitude, how they feel about their jobs and the organization they are working with. Also it is about the commitment or the emotional attachment which an employee shares with the organization. And the commitment is a result of satisfaction which the staff gets from the overall functionality of an organization including good working condition, good leaders, role and goal clarity, clear and accessible policies. Engaged employees are more satisfied and are more likely to stay with their organization as a result of that commitment.

The performance curve of organizations with highly engaged employee's moves in upward direction and is smoother. Engagement is a great predictor of future financial performance; it affects business outcomes as well. Engagement drives up profits in turbulent conditions. The contribution of employees in terms of enhanced performance helps an organization to win over difficult times.²¹

Employee engagement is related to meaningful business outcomes.⁴⁷ Engaged employees enable successful implementation of business strategies, they fuel higher levels of business performance. Fully engaged workforce is loyal, and will align their efforts with organizational goals to remain in competition.⁴⁸

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