



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Managing People

(LCBB5004)

Assignment 2

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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16.12.2020

Concept and drivers of employee engagement

Coined by William Khan in 1990, employee engagement has become a part of today's organisations. Companies small and big have substantially invested in policies and practices that foster commitment and engagement among their employees due to the benefits associated to engaged employees. Engaged employees have proved to be a major resource, giving companies a competitive advantage over competitors. Engaged employees have also been associated to higher productivity levels as well as lower turnover levels (Vance 2006).

According to Armstrong and Taylor (2017) "engaged employees are those who are willing to go an extra mile and offer their employers more than they have contracted them to do, they are also most likely to stay with a company for longer. Engagement is an outcome of employees' satisfaction with their jobs, pride in their employer, and most of all, the feeling that their employers value their contribution to the company (Foot et al 2016; Torrington 2017). Though most employers have perceived higher pay as a basis for building an engaged team of employees, research has shown otherwise. Engagement is about employers putting in place conditions that ensure that employees work more effectively, which in tandem releases their discretionary behaviour. It is not even about forcing employees to work harder (Armstrong and Taylor 2017).

According to Bakker and Leiter (2010) an engaged workforce displays high levels of energy and are willingly involved in their work.

What is employee engagement?

Hughes and Rog (2008, p. 749) state that employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organisation, manager, or co-workers that in turn influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work.

Shuck and Reio (2013, p. 1) define employee engagement as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural energy an employee directs toward positive organisational outcomes. They go on to operationally define employee engagement as a series of psychological states (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) ultimately representing an intention to act that encompasses motivation-like quality.

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(cognitive, emotional and behavioural) ultimately representing an intention to act that encompasses motivation-like quality.

Employee engagement is an employee's strong emotional and intellectual connection for his/ her job, the organisation, coworkers and managers which in tandem influences him/ her to go an extra mile in fulfilling his/ her duties (Hughes and Rog 2008). CIPD (2014) defined it as an employee's strong connection to the organisation, its values and willingness to help colleagues. It is an emotional, cognitive and behavioural energy that employees put in, in order to help a company achieve its goals (Shuck and Rose 2013). In fact, the authors referred to employee engagement as psychological states of mind that boosts motivational qualities in an employee. According to 2020 Gallup Work Place Insights, employee engagement not just a predictor of profitability, customer loyalty and sales, it has through the COVID 19 pandemic proved to be a great predictor of company performance during hard economic times (Pendell 2020). The report also pointed out that remote workers can potentially have higher engagement level depending on feedback and general communication from their leaders. The company's decision to allow its employees to work remotely is thus a great idea. Engaged employees are 18% more productive, 37% unlikely to be absent from work and generate 18% higher earnings (Feffer 2018). Despite the

advantages associated to an engaged workforce, only 33% of American employees are engaged, 52% just show up while 17% are admittedly disengaged (Feffer 2018).

Drivers of employee engagement

Communication

A culture of transparency in communication across all levels of an organisation is a major driver of engagement among employees. This is mainly because employee, supervisor/ manager relationships are at the heart of employee engagement. According to Feffer (2018), employee supervisor relationships account for at least 70% of engagement score, making them very important.

Opportunity for work family balance

One of the main reasons for voluntary resignation is failure to balance work needs and those of family yet ability for employees to combine home and work responsibilities is a major driver of employee engagement. Companies that offer flexible working conditions for their employees thus have higher chances of reducing turnover, increasing productivity and a competitive edge against competitors (Torrington et al 2017).

Leaders/ line managers

Leaders play a vital role in building an engaged team of employees (Torrington et al 2017; Armstrong and Taylor 2017). According to Ratanjee (2019), leaders that build enthusiasm among employees they engage 7 out of 10 employees but when they do not, they are likely to engage only 1 out of 100 employees. This is because employees prefer leaders that inspire them, connect with them and appreciate them.

Leaders who create a blame free environment and are trustworthy are major components of psychological safety, a state that boosts employee engagement (Bedarkar and Pandita 2014).

In order to engage employees, leaders must be able to involve them in decision making, allow them independence in their work, and by all means avoid close supervision. It is also the duty of employers to ensure that the workplace is effective.

Job challenge

According to Armstrong and Taylor (2017) job challenge is a major employee motivator because it is associated with high growth potential, mastery and accomplishment. This boosts positive feelings and increased effort to deal with challenges, making employees feel that much is expected of them by the employer. High expectations in tandem

boost persistent, increased effort and performance among employees (Crawford et al 2014). As noted by the authors, the higher the job challenge, the extent of innovation and new ideas expected of employees and the level of difficulty involved in the job tend to boost engagement. Employees in general tend to respond to higher job challenges and expectations with higher levels of engagement because it increases potential for growth and higher accomplishment (Armstrong and Taylor 2017).

Autonomy

The level of independence given to employees in scheduling their work and determining how to do it is a major driver of higher engagement. According to Torrington et al (2017), autonomy makes employees feel more important and increases the sense of ownership and control of job outcomes, giving more meaning to work. Satisfaction of autonomy, which is considered a universal basic human need motivates people to be more engaged and proactive (Crawford et al 2014).

Feedback

Feedback is another major form of boosting employee engagement because when employees are regularly informed about the impact of their work, they feel recognised, appreciated, and valued by the

organisation (Armstrong and Taylor 2017). This boosts their confidence and psychological meaningfulness, allowing them to assess their progress and growth towards given goals (Crawford et al 2014).

According to Pendell (2020), feedback from supervisors and co-workers provides significant information which boosts engagement especially among among remote workers.

Rewards (pay)

Rewards have been pointed out as as one of the boosters of employee engagement. Appropriate reward systems (financial and non financial) have potential to build employee engagement but can also hinder it if badly executed (Armstrong and Taylor 2017). Whereas most companies believe that offering employees rewards such as high pay reduce turnover, Torrington et al (2017) opined that rewards, especially pay are the least motivators when it comes to retaining employees. Though pay plays an important role, it only tends to be effective if employees are already happy with their work and also satisfied with other factors. Many researchers in the field of HRM have discovered that rewards alone can neither stop people from leaving their jobs nor engage already fed up employees (Torrington et al 2017).

Measuring engagement

Surveys

Since the introduction of the term employee engagement, a number of consultants have come up with a number of tools for measuring employee engagement. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2017), surveys are the foundation for building an engaged workforce. They analyse and explore a number of common themes including;

- Job satisfaction
- Satisfaction with employer
- Personal support from supervisors
- Pride in employer
- Effort above and beyond the minimum
- Recognition by leaders
- Opportunity to perform better at challenging tasks
- Intentions to stay with employer
- Growth opportunities with employer

Through surveys, employers are able to analyse, assess and act on employee challenges and engage them (Armstrong and Taylor 2017). Today, many organisations across the world rely on workforce surveys to measure the intensity of employee engagement and also analyse the relationship between an engaged workforce and business success. Through survey findings, companies are able to point out which employee engagement initiatives are working and which ones are not and how they are likely to improve HR practices related to engagement (Vance 2006; Torrington et al 2017).

Employee surveys have evolved through the years and have now become shorter, less time consuming, and focus on most frequently administered instruments. Most surveys are now conducted online rather than with paper and pen and mainly link employee attitudes to business goals and objectives (Vance 2006).

Balanced Score Cards (BSC)

Performance dashboards such as the balanced score card are another tool, commonly used by companies today. The Balanced Score Card ensures that all key performance metrics are measured. It measures the performance of employees, operations, customers as well as a company's financial performance. BSC is important in strengthening a

company's mission as well as boosting employee engagement. A score card is most used because it measures different factors which all form the basis of employee engagement, one of the biggest metrics is the company's commitment to helping its employees reach their potential and the employees' commitment to helping the business reach its business goals (Kelleher 2014).

Employee value proposition and strategies to raise levels of engagement

Employee value proposition refers to experiences offered by an employer to his/ her employees as an appreciation for their performance and productivity in striving to achieve company goal (Yates and Sejen 2011). During recessionary times, companies should be able to create sustainable, value propositions to attract, reward and retain talent.

According to Yates and Sejen (2011), an employee value proposition consists of employee experiences from benefits, rewards to growth opportunities and other intrinsic factors such as the work environment, culture and management style. The Society of Human resource management suggests that companies should always assess there employee value proposition (EVP) to ensure that it is still relevant (Yates and Sejen 2011).

'Health, Wellness, Growth and Family are the core of our business'

The company strives to make every employee the best at what he/ she does through career advancement, on-job learning, networking opportunities and formal training. It also aims at supporting employee work family balance because employers know how a healthy home-life balance can boost motivation and engagement. Employees health is at the top of the company's priorities. With gym subscription, parental leave, counselling and life insurance, the company has put systems in place to ensure a healthy group of employees. In order to curb the spread of COVID 19, the company has promoted remote working alongside flexible working. The company culture plays a great role in building trust and unity among employees and has boosted collaborative working and employee engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The term employee engagement has gained popularity over the years with employees realising the opportunities of having an engaged workforce. In order to a comp, any to increase employee engagement, it is essential for employers to build a culture that promotes positive work attitude, reduces stress, encourages collaboration and communication, promotes interest, excitement and growth opportunities.

Considering that the company has promoted remote working, it should ensure regular communication and feedback between employees and supervisors. According to research findings, feedback is important in boosting employee engagement especially among remote workers. It should also conduct surveys every once in a while to measure how engaged the employees are and to also understand if its value proposition is still appropriate.

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