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Signed: 
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1. Introduction

Employee engagement is an area that has continued to gain momentum over the previous 10 years and is now widely recognised as being an intrinsic component in organisational approaches to people management where mutually beneficially outcomes for employer and employees are deemed to translate into happier and healthier employees and improved organisational outcomes (Engage for Success, 2014).

This briefing paper explores the origins of employee engagement and how it is defined by thought leaders and leading experts in this field, whilst seeking to distinguish how it relates to other concepts impacting on employees' wellbeing and output.

The paper seeks to identify the engagement practices deployed in organisations exhibiting high levels of engagement and demonstrate how these link in with other key organisational factors in order that benefits are derived by the various stakeholders concerned.

Further, examples of key employee engagement data sources are highlighted and consideration given to a selection of factors and the extent to which these influence employee engagement.

The paper concludes with an evaluation of the role of employee engagement in the contemporary world of work and outlines some of the current thinking in terms of themes that require exploration if further insights are to be derived as employee engagement continues to evolve.

2. Define employee engagement and explain how it relates to other concepts such as organisational commitment, employer involvement and job satisfaction.

According to the CIPD (2018a), employee engagement has its roots in the historic work undertaken by Herzberg (2003) and Maslow in the area of employee motivation and also forming part of its foundation is the research undertaken by Daniel Katz in 1964 who sought to establish the link between employee motivation and organisational citizenship behaviour that identified the need for employees to expend the discretionary effort necessary to go the extra mile. This theory was further expanded upon by Katz and William Kahn in 1978 who identified spontaneous, intrinsically co-operative behaviours that the researchers deemed as being absolutely necessary to optimal organisational functioning (LePine, et al., 2016; Bridger, 2015).

The definition that the CIPD deem as being one of the most enduring is the one proposed by Kahn (1990) who put forward the theory that engagement is achieved when people apply themselves cognitively, psychologically and physically to their roles. This three dimensional concept includes the outward expressions associated with each element, for example, physical engagement manifests itself in a willingness to expend additional discretionary effort in one's role, whilst cognitive engagement is evidenced through employees' high levels of concentration in their work and finally, emotional engagement engenders feelings of both enthusiasm for and pride in the work being undertaken (Taylor & Woodhams, 2016).

Additionally, the CIPD references the seminal research undertaken by a group of occupational psychologists from Utrecht University who espouse

the view that engagement contains three elements, namely: vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). According to the CIPD, this narrower psychological and physical definition facilitates more reliable measurement of engagement levels amongst employees which would provide clearer outcomes for action (CIPD, 2018a). This measure could be used in conjunction with other organisational constructs, for example, job satisfaction, to provide greater organisational insights upon which to act.

In her presentation to the Australian Psychology Society's Annual Conference, Ferguson (2005) highlighted the confusion in literature as to what engagement actually entails, whilst acknowledging that many high profile companies and research organisations (Gallup amongst them) view engagement as a powerful source of competitive advantage and asserted that organisational results have evidenced the link between certain conceptualisations of engagement, worker performance and business outcomes.

Whilst this confusion in defining engagement is apparent with the CIPD, stating that employee engagement is a repackaging of various concepts, specifically, motivation and commitment (CIPD, 2018a), there are other authors that draw a distinction between engagement and other constructs. An example of this is the view held by Russell (2003) who highlighted that the job-related affects affiliated to job satisfaction and engagement are reflected in different areas of the well-established theoretical model he devised, specifically, that engagement is activated by high arousal positive feelings at work (ie: energy and enthusiasm), organisational commitment

and job satisfaction are characterised by less activated positive feelings (ie: commitment and contentment) (Albrecht, 2010).

3. Description of HR, leadership and cultural elements of organisations which have high levels of employee engagement, making reference to academic literature on the subject. You should also explain the need for aligning employee engagement with other key organisational factors.

According to the CIPD, organisations should adopt a multi-faceted and holistic approach to employee engagement if they are to reflect high levels of engagement, where communications, HR policies / systems and learning & development are aligned to support their workforce to understand their role in the organisation's purpose, goals and culture, whilst considering the emotional wellbeing and motivational drivers of their employees (CIPD, 2018a). A key factor in successfully embedding a culture that fosters high engagement levels is gaining the buy-in of senior leaders and line managers in the process and their research has evidenced that managers reflecting the competencies and behaviours outlined in "the managing for sustainable employee engagement framework" as devised by the CIPD, is pivotal in achieving enhanced levels of engagement, which in turn, reflect improved organisational performance and employee wellbeing (CIPD, 2012).

This message was re-enforced by Bridger (2015) who, through the course of her research, identified a number of key themes that employers who were actively demonstrating transformational engagement practices deployed, which included managers been equipped with the skills and capabilities to engage their people which engendered a high level of trust in management. Further key contributors included integrating engagement into every touch point of the employee/employer relationship from recruitment through to

exit; that organisations strive to be listening organisations where employees are given genuine voice and finally, engagement playing a fundamental role within the organisational strategy.

In their submission to the UK government Macleod & Clarke (2009) included the aforementioned areas of leadership, supportive line managers and employee voice in their list of four fundamental engagement enablers whilst also making reference to the importance of organisational integrity and the integral role that having values firmly embedded into the organisational culture plays in fostering high engagement levels and how an ethos of “what we say is what we do” links closely to the trust relationship between employee/employer which Engage for Success deem a fundamental element of high engagement in an organisation.

The importance of aligning engagement initiatives to organisational factors is an imperative when seeking to bring about cultural change and increased engagement. Pink (2011) stated that the first major driver of engagement was shared purpose and Peter Cheese (CEO, CIPD) re-iterated the significance of organisations having a clear purpose (which in itself, should be engaging) and ensuring that this is clearly communicated to employees who should have a clear line of sight of what their role is in achieving that vision. An example of this was cited by the author when, during a presidential visit in the 1960's, a floor cleaner was asked what his role was and he stated that “it was to help put a man on the moon” (Smith, et al., 2014).

Further, research has evidenced that engagement levels increase when organisations encourage autonomous teams to work within broader parameters and having access to the appropriate resources and training

necessary to get the job done. Additionally, it should be noted that prioritising engagement as a business imperative is a long term commitment that needs to be driven from the top down whilst being cognisant that employee wellbeing remain top of mind for business leaders. This was evidenced in a case study by David Smith (People and IT Function Lead) who stated that it took the better part of 15 years to turn the Asda retail business from near bankrupt to a thriving enterprise who highlighted the significance of business leaders committing to addressing engagement levels through cultural change over the long term and not viewing this as an area that can be improved upon by a one-off initiatives (Smith, et al., 2014).

4. Explain why employee engagement is increasingly a vital dimension of HR strategy and practice. The potential benefits for different stakeholders should be evaluated with reference to published sources.

According As stated under Point 2 above, transformational engagement is founded in employees having high levels of trust in management and engagement being woven into each touch point throughout the employer/employee relationship (Bridger, 2015). Consequently, it is vital that this translates into HR strategy and practice and recruitment processes, performance management, learning and development, remuneration and reward would need to be reflective of this. An example of how this approach could be embedded from the outset of the employment lifecycle was the overhaul that was undertaken to Co-op's induction programme in Manchester, which saw the introduction of a mixed media welcome pack and early engagement with people following their acceptance of a position. This straight forward and cost effective change resulted in employee

engagement scores rising by 7% and turnover reducing to 4.5%, as well as a £400k saving on recruitment and training costs (Pollit, 2013).

Taylor & Woodhams (2016) state the need for HR policies and practice to be transparent and accessible as transparency in regards to how performance and reward strategies are linked to defined career pathways, for example, by providing people with clarity and a line of sight as to how what they do contributes to the organisational agenda, whilst having the knowledge of the systems and processes that support how they map their career journey.

Much has been written about the diverse benefits of having an engaged workforce and the universal nature of this claim was highlighted in the Macleod Report initiated by the UK government in 2008 which made the claim that individuals at work, enterprises and the country as a whole could enjoy significant benefits in organisations characterised by high levels of employee engagement (Macleod & Clarke, 2009). According to the CIPD (2014), engaged employees are happier, healthier and more fulfilled and as such, are able to provide higher levels of performance, which it follows, should translate into favourable organisational outcomes and an enhanced customer experience.

Furthermore, research has indicated that high levels of engagement are linked to a diverse array of improved outcomes, which includes organisational safety records, productivity, profitability and loyalty (Harter & Schmidt, 2002).

5. Summarise key sources of employee engagement related data, citing different examples.

According to Taylor & Woodhams (2016), organisations committed to engendering an environment of high engagement levels amongst employees, the leadership team would need to take its learnings from within the organisation, whilst surveying the external environment to keep abreast of developing trends and learnings that can be gleaned from various sources.

In regards to internal sources, management reports relating to absence data, disciplinary cases, productivity levels and staff satisfaction surveys are examples of sources that can provide insights into employee engagement, for example, 360 degree reviews of managers conducted by their direct reports could identify whether managers are mentoring their workforce and providing opportunities for learning and growth. According to the Journal for Vocational Behaviour, 80% of learning happens on an informal basis and through engaging in a mentorship scheme, benefits include increased staff satisfaction and organisational commitment (Ghosh & Reio Jr, 2013).

In terms of external sources of engagement data, there are a number of reports and surveys that have been undertaken that highlight the importance of fundamental elements that employers need to get right in a world of work that is seeing exponential increases in globalisation, technological advances and innovation. The first of these is the OBR Report on UK Productivity which outlined that the UK is 15% less productive per employee than the average of its EU competitors and that productivity overall has increased by a mere 1.4% over the past decade (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2019). Further, the CBI's From Ostrich to Magpie Report highlights that the inertia of some 70% of British employers has resulted in

them failing to adopt available new technologies whilst the highest performing organisations were found to be those who were highly innovative and leaders in developing their workforce (Confederation of British Industry, 2017). This is significant because learning and development has been directly linked to employees feeling valued in the workplace.

A further statistic included in the CBI's report is that 72% of employees stated that they would work harder and increase their contribution at work if they were appreciated by their employers, which speaks to the requirement for employers to consider their reward and recognition programmes. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, salary is deemed a basic need, however, recognition is a key factor in ensuring that employees feel valued in the workplace and actively acknowledging their efforts will contribute to stimulating empowerment and ensuring their esteem needs are met. This point is reinforced by Deloitte who found that employee engagement, productivity and performance are 14% higher in organisations with an employee recognition focus than those without one (Deloitte, 2019b).

6. Outline the findings of recent studies on employee engagement, including the extent to which gender, demographic and other factors influence levels of engagement.

According to (Powell, 2019), demographic and job characteristics play a significant role in determining the engagement level of employees, where age, nature of the organisation, position within the organisational hierarchy and income serve to influence engagement levels.

In a study conducted in India of 404 executives, working within both the private and the public sector, the study revealed that there were above

average levels of engagement amongst this group and that sector was deemed a neutral factor (Chaudhary & Rangnekar, 2017). These findings were synonymous with research conducted by Towers Perrin (2003) who compared various demographic segments and job levels across the private and not-for-profit sectors, wherein, it was established that whilst there was a pattern across job segments, the only one notable finding was that senior executives were more highly engaged than any other group. They too found that sector was not a predictor of engagement with different organisations in each sector displaying the highest and the lowest engagement scores, which was a finding corroborated by the Institute for Employment Studies in their 2009 report (Robinson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Additionally, whilst the Chaudhary & Rangnekar (2017) report out-ruled any sole linkage between income and engagement, it did highlight the significance that job characteristics had in driving high levels of engagement, for example, stimulation, access to resources, growth opportunities and autonomy.

Whilst gender failed to conclusively contribute to the understanding of work engagement in the aforementioned studies, other sources evidence women been more engaged than men, possibly as they tend to find more fulfilment in their jobs according to the Gallup study (Johnson, 2004). This was a finding upheld in a survey of eight organisations across sectors by (Robinson, et al., 2007) whose research put women marginally ahead of men in engagement scores (however, a subsequent Workplace Survey conducted in 2012 found that engagement levels between men and women had equalled out). Robinson (2007) also identified that engagement levels were highest amongst employees aged 20 or lower and those aged 60 and above.

Another survey of 7,500 individuals in conjunction with HR and line managers suggested that the older the employee, the more engaged they are, however, the authors highlighted that this may be indicative of the Baby Boomer generation holding high levels of seniority within organisations , (BlessingWhite, 2008).

7. Conclude with a balanced evaluative summary of the future of employee engagement.

In their UK Working Lives Report, the CIPD sampled 6,009 workers from 350,000 adults in work between December 2017 and January 2018. This figure, according to the Office of National Statistics, was reflective of the UK workforce in terms of gender, work status, organisational size within each sector and industry and served to assess the quality of UK jobs presently. The report found that there needs to be collaborative working amongst employers, employees and industry in order that work is a force for good for everybody. This would translate into increased access to flexible working, championing mental health and wellbeing and reviewing job design and organisational culture (CIPD, 2018b).

The need to review job design and organisational culture in order to reduce instances of excessive workload and related stress is pertinent in the contemporary workplace and is picked up on in a study by Yale University who, in 2018, found that 1 in 5 highly engaged employees from the 1,000 surveyed had suffered episodes of burn-out. The trend towards job intensification in recent times, especially when linked to employees exhibiting high levels of engagement, can result in engaged individuals exhibiting disengaged or actively disengaged behaviour if left unmanaged (Sappala & Moeller, 2018).

Whilst there is significant evidence that high levels of employee engagement appear to translate into improved organisational outcomes, Taylor & Woodhams (2016) do highlight the difficulty in establishing the causal relationship between employee engagement and corporate profits. This is largely as a result of there been an insufficient availability of verifiable data made available to the public with one notable exception, namely, the Gallup Organisation, who in their study of 36 companies across 8,000 business units were able to show that those organisations that scored within the top 25% on work engagement, were able to realise a 1% to 4% higher profitability.

A note of caution is in regards to the assumptions made in relation to the extent to which employee engagement translates into enhanced corporate outcomes. Taylor & Woodhams (2016) highlight the danger of attributing superior profits to a single consideration without taking into account the many complex considerations that drive profitability. Furthermore, the authors raise the question as to whether organisational success drives higher levels of engagement as opposed to the other way around.

What can't be discounted, however, is that employee engagement continues to evolve in line with the current economic uncertainty and the contemporary and ever changing world of work. This uncertainty is referenced in an article published by The Independent in early 2018, which stated that 40% of UK workers had a side-hustle as a result of the insecurity of day jobs (Chapman, 2018). It should be noted that there are areas that warrant further scrutiny if creating and sustaining engagement is to remain a fundamental component of the people management approach (Purcell, 2014). These areas would include further exploration of potential barriers to engagement and the unintended consequences of engagement. (Truss,

et al., 2014) identified seven key questions which could support further future insights and encompass contemporary themes, for example: How does engagement interact with diversity and how can employee engagement strategies be evaluated?

According to research conducted by Deloitte, if employers are to gain competitive advantage through employees exhibiting high engagement, long term loyalty and brand recognition, employee engagement should be grounded in organisations creating a total relationship with their workforce and fostering an environment in which they can perform and flourish over the long term (Deloitte, 2019).

An intrinsic part of continuing to develop and embed engagement requires that a number of the drivers referred to previously (ie: good quality management, development opportunities and accessible HR policies and practices) are supplemented by additional differentiators like permanent dis-satisfaction with the status quo and consistent / continuous role-modelling from the top if maximum benefits are to be derived (Taylor & Woodhams, 2016).

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