

Managing People A2

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Review: Concepts and drivers of employee engagement

Employee engagement

The approach of employee engagement is considered as facilitating appropriate conditions for all members of an organization that can ensure all members can be committed to the organization's values and goals and contribute to the organization through their best performance. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) noted that HRM and performance need to be employee centred and focused on employee wellbeing. Kwon and Park (2019) noted that despite the employee engagement research is proliferating in the area of Human Resource Development, there is a lack of practical knowledge regarding assessing, boosting, and sustaining employee engagement in the workplace.

Despite the lack of employee engagement theories, there are various definitions available that consider employee engagement to be personally engaging the members of an organization for harnessing them to their job roles. Employee engagement increases both individual and organizational performance, workforce productivity, and wellbeing as Torrington *et al.* (2020) noted businesses with employee engagement tends to be twice as successful as those with a lower level of employee engagement.

One of the crucial aspects of employee engagement is to promote trust, two-way communication, commitment, and integrity. While internal communication is perceived as a crucial factor for integrating employee engagement, Lemon and Palenchar (2018) noted that internal communication is a technical tool for producing organizational messages rather than developing employee engagement.

Employee engagement is perceived as a mediator of work motivation and job satisfaction while these two variables are also noted for their positive impact on work engagement. Improved employee engagement tends to be a result of an improved level of motivation that promotes workplace commitment and often results in increased job satisfaction. According to Riyanto *et al.* (2021) managing employee turnover is one of the major challenges for current organizations and decreased motivation and lack of commitment are leading to increasing voluntary turnover. The definition of employee engagement varies across different organizations and some of the popular definitions of employee engagement refer to employee engagement as a commitment, positive attachment, morale, and participation of the employees.

Various organizational practices can positively influence employee engagement by boosting employee morale and their willingness to contribute to the organization's goals and success. Davis and Van der Heijden (2018) revealed that the majority of the researchers have perceived Kahn's definition of employee engagement which indicates when engaged people employ and express themselves emotionally, physically, and cognitively during their role performances.

Factors driving employee engagement

From the need-based theories of motivation especially Herzberg's Two-factor theory of motivation, it can be noted that remuneration or salary, along with job security, and access to organizational resources are basic factors that ensure employees are not dissatisfied. However, for engaging the employees in the workplace, factors beyond the basic needs of the employees need to be considered which can drive improved performance and willingness to contribute to the organizational success. The main drivers of employee engagement are the following:

- **Organizational support:** Khodakarami and Dirani (2020) noted that effective support from the leaders, managers, and peers tends to improve the engagement level of the employees. A supportive workplace boosts employee morale and improves the perceived belongingness of the employees which positively impacts the engagement level of the employees.
- **Autonomy:** Highly engaged workforce is often subjected to a certain beneficial workplace environment which is characterized by autonomy. Employees are likely to be more interested and engaged in achieving the organizational goals if they are provided with the autonomy of expressing opinions, contributing to the decision-making, freedom to choose time management, and application of expertise as opposed to micro-management. Joseph *et al.* (2018) noted that engaged employees are motivated to become more creative and innovative and a leadership style that provides significant autonomy to the employees tends to result in improved employee engagement.
- **Resources:** Resources are often overlooked but are a crucial driver of employee engagement as it enables employees to feel capable of putting intellectual, physical, and emotional energy into their work. Waseem and Mehmood (2019) noted that desired psychological conditions crucial for engagement can be generated from factors like task significance, support, work design, and access to personal and organizational resources.
- **Leadership:** Leadership plays a crucial role in engaging and motivating the employees and effective leadership can influence the organizational environment as well.

MADUKA (2020) noted that leaders need to create an open and fair environment for the employees in the organization to ensure that employees understand the align themselves with the goals and values of the organization.

- Positive organizational environment: Positive organizational environment that supports inclusion, collaboration, and employee wellbeing is a significant driver of employee engagement. A positive organizational environment is characterized by clear job roles, work-life balance, positive relationships with colleagues and the managers, fair and equal treatment, and effective organizational support.

Apart from these factors, meaningful work, employee voice practices, constructive feedback, training, and professional development opportunities are effective in enhancing employee engagement.

Evaluation of the diagnostic tools used to measure the engagement

The level of engagement often differs based on the individual differences, personalities, and motivational levels of the employees. However, measuring engagement can prove to be challenging when it is approached separately from the individual performance of the employees. Currently, in the post-pandemic era when employees are subjected to flexible and remote working, assessing the engagement level is crucial for taking further measures that can enhance the engagement level of the employees.

From the level of satisfaction or the quantity of work employee engagement cannot be measured correctly as the concept of engagement is associated with the level of commitment, motivation, and connection that employees feel with their job role, work, and the company. The level of engagement can fluctuate depending on both internal and external factors and thus, measuring the engagement is necessary to take necessary steps to prevent employees from becoming disengaged.

- **Employee survey and feedback**

Conducting an internal survey is a simple and effective tool for gathering opinions, and feedback, and facilitating communication which can help in categorizing employees based on their engagement level. Surveys conducted on employees can help in measuring the level of engagement based on their responses. However, this tool cannot identify the reasons for disengagement and issues that are leading to a disengaged workforce. Langford (2009) noted that incorporating psychometric properties in an employee opinion survey at the lower-level factor structure of the work practices and the higher-level work systems can help in measuring the engagement level effectively.

- **Software-based HR Platforms**

Software-based HR platforms provide easy and user-friendly interfaces for obtaining employee responses on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis. These platforms help in generating real-time feedback and can provide a clear indicator of engagement at both individual and the organizational level. Different HR-based enterprise systems help in generating feedback from team managers, employees, HR leaders, and other staff in the organization for generating reports through which it is possible to track the engagement level of the employees.

- **Utrecht Work Engagement scale**

Schaufeli *et al.* (2017) noted that Utrecht is one of the most widely used work engagement measurement scales that helps in generating results based on in-depth interviews and the 17-item self-report questionnaire. This tool can be effective in identifying the vigor, dedication, and absorption level of the employees. UWES is also available in shorter versions and can be used for employee engagement surveys.

- **Productivity metrics and retention rate**

Although employee engagement depends on various factors apart from the willingness to switch the company and the productivity of the employees, for gaining tangible and quantitative results, measuring productivity metrics and the retention rate can be effective. These tools have the risk of providing inadequate results suggesting faulty engagement scores as these are based on the productivity and employees' tendency to work in the organization.

Employee engagement surveys are the most used diagnostic tool; however, multinational companies have focused on developing their individual and unique engagement measurement scales based on important determinants of employee engagement including the wellbeing score and the employee perception of their work. Evaluating the psychological stressors and the stress level of the employees can also help in understanding whether the employees are engaged with their work as stressors tend to act as demotivators negatively affecting the engagement levels of the employees. Geldenhuys *et al.* (2014) prefer jobs that they find to be interesting, accomplishing, and helpful for their development. Thus, evaluating the job designs and obtaining feedback from the employees regarding their perception of their jobs can help in assessing their engagement level indirectly.

Shuck and Reio Jr (2014) noted that working in negative psychological climates causes negative emotions that can lead to negative psychological well-being. Thus, identifying whether the employees are getting adequate support and whether they are satisfied with the work environment can help in understanding the reasons for their level of engagement.

Employee value proposition and strategies to raise levels of engagement

The employee value proposition is an organizational policy that enables firms to attract, and retain the most talented employees based on the offerings of the organization to the employees.

Pawar (2018) noted that employee value proposition acts as an organizational strategy for dealing with challenges of HR and marketing. Developing a unique employee value proposition is crucial for effective employer branding that can lead an organization to become a preferred employer within the labour market. Yacine (2021) has defined employee value proposition as the experiences and the things that the employer intends to offer the employees. The following employee value proposition can be effective for the organization:

“Our company ensures an inclusive and supportive work environment that addresses the diverse needs of the members ensuring that the members of our organization are motivated, satisfied, and well-equipped to contribute to the overall success of the firm. This organization offers flexible and adaptive work practices that can ensure every member of the organization can provide their best to achieve the organizational goals along with continuous learning and development that prepares the members to excel in their professional life.”

For raising employee engagement, the following strategies can be effective:

- Formulating the core values and the mission of the organization and linking them to the human resource strategies of the company
- Prioritising employee well-being by introducing mental health assessment and measures for improving mental health outcomes of the employees
- Ensuring an improved work-life balance of the employees by providing them rotational work opportunities and ensuring workload is distributed fairly
- Recognising and rewarding achievements of the individuals and teams can enable improved engagement levels
- Conducting frequent employee engagement surveys and taking initiatives to integrate the feedback of the employees in the workplace practices
- Providing training and learning opportunities for ensuring professional development and self-actualization of the employees
- Fostering a learning and collaborative environment through effective knowledge management practices
- Assessing the interests and the skills of the employees before assigning any job role
- Promoting autonomy in teams and ensuring employees can express their feelings and opinions without any fear
- Improving the sense of security of the employees by introducing performance-based appraisals and constructive feedback

- Helping employees to understand their important role in the organization and promoting their sense of belongingness in the organization

Conclusion

In the current organizational context, as the company is already focussing on improving the well-being of the employees by introducing flexible working, remote working, and job designs, measuring employee engagement through using tailor-made software and anonymous surveys can be effective. Generating feedback, and evaluating the performance of the employees can help in understanding the current issues that can cause a lack of engagement. Furthermore, digital workplaces have increased the working hours and work pressure, assessing the mental well-being of the employees and the stress level can be crucial for implementing necessary measures to drive engagement. Fostering a positive and supportive working environment, effective leadership, providing employees autonomy, and opportunities to contribute to the organization meaningfully can increase the engagement level.

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