Employee Engagement: A Requisite for Boosting Innovation and High Performance

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ABSTRACT With the changing paradigm of business, employees are considered as an indispensable part of the creativity and innovation process. Engaging employees in contributing their innovative ideas has become an important human resource management tool in the recent times. It boosts the employees' morale and helps them gain recognition. It helps in getting feedback from those employees who deal with the customers and thus, very well know about the customers' needs and aspirations. Companies like IBM, Apple and Google are well known in engaging employees for coming up with new ideas and ultimately increasing their efficiency, profits and goodwill. In this paper, which is exploratory in nature, some examples are quoted from the India Inc. where employee engagement is done to boost innovation and creativity and is thus proving to become an effective human resource management tool.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement, a vital tool of Human Resource Management, is very broad in scope as there are potentially thousands of different individual actions, attitudes and processes that effect and enhance employee engagement. One of the areas where employee engagement can be of immense advantage is extracting creative ideas from employees, because engaged employees drive innovation. Great ideas for enhancing corporate growth and profits are not discovered in the laboratories late at night, or in the isolation of the executive suite. They come from the people who daily fight the company's battles, who serve the customers, explore new markets, that is from employees (Spender and Strong).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term 'employee engagement' was first published by Kahn in 1990, who described it as being different from other employee roles such as job involvement, commitment or intrinsic motivation, asserting that it focused on how psychological experiences of work affect the people in presenting and absenting themselves during task performances (Kahn, 1990). Later, the term was variously defined by scholars. Employee Engagement is the positive feeling experienced by employees towards their jobs and also the motivation and effort they put into it (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) view engagement at work as an antipole to burnout. Employee Engagement has also been associated with commitment (MacCashland, 1999) According to Wellins and Concelman (2005) engagement is "an amalgamation of commitment, loyalty, productivity, and ownership". To be engaged is to be emotionally and intellectually committed to one's organization (Bhatnagar, 2007).

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The main objective of this paper is to study and understand various employee engagement techniques implemented by some companies for driving innovation which have also led to increase in productivity of the related company.

DATA COLLECTION

The nature of this paper is exploratory and the information is collected from the print literature (leading newspaper dailies) and websites.

SOME EVIDENCES
GOOGLE INDIA (INTERNET COMPANY)

At Google, there are many internal email lists dedicated to the discussion of particular ideas like the Google Ideas website. Googlers regularly submit their thoughts on product improvements or provide suggestions about how things could be made better around Google. The colleagues can then provide their feedback through comments and ratings. The management team pays close attention and is responsive to issues that Googlers deem important enough to discuss on their internal e-mail lists.

MARUTI SUZUKI (AUTOMOBILE COMPANY)

Maruti has an efficiency enhancement and wastage elimination system known as Maruti Production System. The ideas come from the employees. The activities that increase workers' fatigue are video-graphed for a time motion study and opened up for suggestions before a team. Every month employees participate in Suggestion scheme quality circle and come up with simple solutions to eliminate wastage. It gives the workers a sense of pride when they see their suggestions translated into actions across work areas.

MICROSOFT INDIA (COMPUTER SOFTWARE COMPANY)

Microsoft India believes that the key to their company's success is collaboration. So they designed Collab lab, at Microsoft's Hyderabad campus, which helps employees collaborate on product design and process workflows. Project teams use the Lab to brainstorm, design, prototype and develop innovative ideas together. Employees have discovered that the use of the Collab Lab has helped teams to boost their productivity immensely and have also enabled them to deliver their product on time.

INFOSYS (IT CONSULTING COMPANY)

Vishal Sikka's initiative to engage with over 1,60,000 employees and shortlisting 10 ideas through a crowd sourcing exercise, murmuration, is another feather in the techniques for employee engagement cap. Infosys has now started building a team of "super ninjas" or domain specialists to strengthen its engagement with clients along with putting in place a group of dozen executives to resolve issues faced by employees.

HCL (IT AND TECHNOLOGY COMPANY)

HCL believes that the employees are at the heart of innovation. So it inspires them by giving them the right tools and creating the right culture which has enabled the employees to collaborate, communicate and innovate freely across teams and boundaries. A few examples of innovative ideas and solutions that have been inspired and developed by the employees are Value portal and MAD Jam for unravelling transformational ideas within the organization, Wilkiportal and Arkmedes for knowledge creation. To drive employees to share their innovative ideas, a group of employees created the "MAD Jam" (Make a Difference Jamboree). It is a unique celebration of best innovators of HCL and ultimately a manifestation of the Employees First Customer Second philosophy.

LUPIN (PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY)

When faced with a problem regarding output, people were selected from cross-functional teams for a brainstorming session, roles were expanded and higher responsibilities were given. The process helped in increasing productivity and had a direct impact on output/cost without any change in the process or acquisitions of new machines.

TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES (IT CONSULTING COMPANY)

To engage their workforce TCS launched Knome, a social intranet which enables employees to connect, collaborate and innovate by sharing ideas, thoughts and giving feedback.

JABONG (E-COMMERCE PORTAL)

Jabong came up with the idea of Fish Philosophy which is based on the simple premise that a simple gesture of appreciation and warmth instills a sense of positivity and channelizes one's focus to strive for excellence. Here the employees can give each other brightly coloured flashcards like "You make a difference", "You are Helpful and "You increase Teamwork". The employees took an instant liking to this concept and it has helped spread a positive vibe.

MAKE MY TRIP (ONLINE TRAVEL COMP ANY)

Make My Trip has a think tank called The Ideas Portal. This portal welcomes ideas from employees on any issue. Employees are then encouraged to vote in favour of the said idea and these are implemented depending on its feasibility. This not only helps the company in making informed decisions but also elicits acceptability of those decisions.

TITAN (WATCH MANUFACTURER)

Titan company is known for its innovative offerings like the Titan Edge watches. The company has a Titan Innovation Council, which is a cross functional team of Senior and Middle management to create ideas and spread the innovation culture across the company. Tata Innoverse is a web based social networking platform to enable employees of all the Tata companies to provide innovative ideas to challenges posted by the senior leaders.

PHILIPS INDIA (ELECTRONICS COMPANY)

In order to involve employees in the decision making process for changing the policies, Philips has created a program called "Parivartan". This is a bottom up approach where employee representatives also called "employee champions" collect feedback about new/existing policies and make a proposal to the management, with its pros and cons. These employee champions are not only responsible to assess the viability of implementing the policy, but are also responsible for putting in place the guidelines and procedures and communicating the change.

A FEW GUIDING STEPS

A few guiding steps for eliciting effective ideas from employees are mentioned below:

It should be believed that great ideas can come from anywhere, from the top most to the bottom most level.

An open door policy should be exercised. There should be increased accessibility and open communication system within the organization.

There should be frequent get togethers for interaction and brainstorming on new ideas.

Use the right kind of motivation. Pride in being a part of the company and personal accomplishment are worth it as compared to the financial incentives.

Do not push the employees to give ideas. Rather try to create a conducive environment.

Merely asking for good suggestions is not enough rather there should be focus on specific request. Like "Give suggestions to minimize paper work" can arouse more response as compared to simply hanging a suggestion box at one corner of the office.

Whatever ideas get submitted, there should be follow up on them and feedback should be given. This way the employees will get to know that their ideas are being heard.

Instill the belief that failure is a part of the game. Let the employees be not held back due to fear of failure or mockery.

Always remember to share a success story. It will motivate the employees and encourage them to make their contributions for the betterment of the organization.

The spirit of encouraging innovation with the help of employee engagement should not be forgotten. Ideas given by the employees should further be analyzed for their feasibility and the whole exercise should not be a mere eyewash.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the examples cited above that organizations have started accepting that in this era of intense and cut throat competition, if customers are the kings then employees are not pawns, rather they too form an integral part of the organization as a whole. As such, they should also be motivated to drive innovation and lend their contribution not only towards their organization but towards the society as well. Moreover, an innovation- oriented company understands the significance of applying the creative ideas of its employees with true spirit so as to make them feel proud and enhance the employees' organizational commitment.

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