



Employee Engagement-A Conceptual Study

KEYWORDS

Employee commitment, Employee satisfaction, Organization citizenship behaviour, Job Involvement

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ABSTRACT

Employee Engagement is about employees having discretionary effort in achieving organisations goals. It is imperative to know how engagement is different from other constructs and its evolution over years. So this paper deals with differentiation of different constructs such as Employee satisfaction, Employee commitment and Organization citizenship behaviour and understanding how the concept of employee engagement has been emerged over years. The study is descriptive in nature and secondary data is considered for the study.

1. Introduction

Employee Engagement is having oneness with organisation. People usually work to earn their daily bread but even though work is necessary to live it is also important that they do work honestly and loyally not only treating work as a burden but also enjoying it. So Employee Engagement is something where an employee not only work to earn but also he sees his job something which is exciting and amazing. An engaged workplace encourages commitment, energy and productivity from all those involved to help improve business performance. Engaged employees are those who are totally absorbed in their work, working longer and harder, taking on additional assignments and all focused on the needs of the organisation. There are differences between attitude, behaviour and outcomes in terms of engagement. An employee might feel pride and loyalty (attitude); be a great advocate of their company to clients, or go the extra mile to finish a piece of work (behaviour). Outcomes may include lower accident rates, higher productivity, fewer conflicts, more innovation, lower numbers leaving and reduced sickness rates. But it is believed that all three – attitudes, behaviours and outcomes – are part of the engagement story. There is a virtuous circle when the pre-conditions of engagement are met when these three aspects of engagement trigger and reinforce one another. Engaged organisations have strong and authentic values, with clear evidence of trust and fairness based on mutual respect, where two way promises and commitments – between employers and staff – are understood, and are fulfilled. Although improved performance and productivity is at the heart of engagement, it cannot be achieved by a mechanistic approach which tries to extract discretionary effort by manipulating employees' commitment and emotions. Employees see through such attempts very quickly; they lead instead to cynicism and disillusionment. By contrast, engaged employees freely and willingly give discretionary effort, not as an 'add on', but as an integral part of their daily activity at work.

1.1 Objectives of the study

1. To study the difference between different constructs relating to Employee Engagement.
2. To study the evolution of Employee Engagement concept.

1.2 Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and secondary data is considered for the study. This paper is based upon review of literature and secondary data collected from various websites, journals, magazines, newspapers and reference books.

1.3 Limitations

Research was also limited to peer-reviewed business, organizational psychology, and management journals, online journals to identify the state of the employee engagement, to study the different degrees of employee engagement with the help of review of literature.

2. Engagement and other constructs:

2.1 Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction: A satisfied employee is happy to clock in and out, doing what is asked of them and little more. A satisfied employee has their needs met by the organization and may not have an incentive to go above and beyond. It is measurement of an employee's "happiness" with current job and conditions; it does not measure how much effort the employee is willing to spend. Satisfaction connotes passive acceptance. A worker could be completely satisfied with their job; they clock in and out every day, but that's it. They do not talk passionately about their work or put forth extra effort. Simply put, they are only there to collect a pay check. It is pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Job satisfaction is one of the widely researched construct and is defined as 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences' (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). Locke's definition emphasizes on the importance of two components— affect or feeling and cognition and thinking.

2.2 Job Involvement

Degree to which one is cognitively preoccupied with, engaged in and concerned with one's present job. Job involvement is defined as the degree to which the job situation is central to the person and his or her identity (Lawler & Hall, 1970). Kanungo (1982) maintained that job involvement is a cognitive or belief state of psychological identification. Job involvement is thought to depend on both need saliency and the potential of a job to satisfy these needs. Thus job involvement results from a cognitive judgement about the needs satisfying abilities of the job. Job in this view are tied to one's self-image. According to May, Gilson and Harter (2004), engagement is closely linked with the constructs of job involvement (Brown, 1996) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Job involvement is defined as 'a cognitive or belief state of psychological identification' (Kanungo, 1982, p. 342).

2.3 Employee commitment

Commitment refers to employee's satisfaction as well as identification with the organization, employee engagement goes a step further, and involves the employee making discretionary efforts towards attainment of organizational goals. According to Britt, there is a difference between an engaged worker, meaning one who invests himself or herself in superior job performance, and organizational commitment, a worker's psychological attachment to his or her organization or employer. Commitment means the employees' dedication towards achieving a particular task effectively and efficiently. It is a some sort of a responsibility to the wellbeing of the organization as a whole. This can be a responsibility to the company, his/her product, facility or department. The success of the company depends on the level of employee commitment towards the organization to achieve the specific goals. Employee commitment is built up with his interest towards a particular task. Therefore, it is the duty and the responsibility of the managers to create a friendly and safe environment within the organization for its employees.

Employee commitment refers to the level of employee dedication towards completing a particular task or an activity; employee engagement involves the employee's contribution towards the attainment of organizational goals. Employee commitment is built up with the satisfaction level of the employees to work in the organization. Saks (2006) argues that the organizational commitment also differs from engagement in that it refers to a person's attitude and attachment towards their organization, while it could be debated that engagement is not just an attitude; it is the degree of attachment, individual attentiveness in work and absorbed in the performance of their role.

2.4 Organization Citizenship Behaviour

Organizational citizenship behaviour is a discretionary behaviour that are beyond formal obligations. OCB is an outcome of the attitudes of job satisfaction and organizational commitment and it is concerned with the characteristics and behaviour of an individual rather than the organization (Robinson et al., 2004). In addition, while OCB involves voluntary and informal behaviours that can help co-workers and the organization.

It is seen that satisfaction has more to do with how we think about our jobs, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is a person's voluntary commitment within an organization or company that is not part of his or her contractual tasks. Employee Commitment is the bond employees experience with their organisation. Broadly speaking, employees who are committed to their organisation generally feel a connection with their organisation, feel that they fit in and, feel they understand the goals of the organisation.

While engagement has more to do with how we feel about job. That is, engagement is really an emotional connection. Engagement differs from job in as it is concerned more with how the individual employee express his/her self during the performance of his/her job. Engagement entails active use of emotions, it is an antecedent to job involvement. The focus of job involvement is on cognitive components while engagement, according to most definitions, also encompasses emotions and behaviours. Employee engagement, on the other hand, means something quite different. An engaged employee is emotionally invested in the mission of the organization. They bring themselves to their job and something that can't be feigned. An engaged employee looks for ways they can give back to the organization and seeks to leave a legacy of high performance in their wake. A measurement of an employee's emotional commitment to an organization; it takes into account the amount of discretionary effort an employee expends on behalf of the organization. It support s organization to improve performance. An engaged employees are those who are emotionally attached to the organization and are always trying to give their maximum contribution for its betterment. It is the degree to which an individual is attentive to their work and absorbed in the performance of their role.

3. Evolution of Employee Engagement:

The first mention of employee engagement appears in an Academy of Management Journal article, "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" (Kahn, 1990). In his article, Kahn explains the underpinnings and major influences on his thought, beginning with the classic sociology text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1961). Goffman (1961) heavily influenced Kahn's (1990) writing as evidenced by Kahn's suggestion that "people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694); a direct reference to Goffman's (1961) interactionist theory. This conceptualization and others alluding to the roles we play in our lives are interwoven throughout Kahn's (1990) development of the first grounded theory of personal engagement and personal disengagement. Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances" (p. 700). Drawing from the work of

Goffman (1961), Maslow (1970), and Alderfer (1972), Kahn (1990) posited that the domains of meaningfulness, safety, and availability are important to fully understanding why a person becomes engaged. Kahn (1990) defined meaningfulness as the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" (p. 705). He defined safety as the ability to show one's self "without fear or negative consequences to self image, status, or career" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705) and availability as the "sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary" (p. 705) for the completion of work.

Kahn's conceptualization of personal engagement and personal disengagement would be the only piece of empirical research on employee engagement until early 2001, when Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001) focused on why employees develop job burnout. Conceptual in nature, Maslach et al. (2001) posited that employee engagement was the positive antithesis to burnout and defined employee engagement as "a persistent positive affective state . . . characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure" (p. 417). Together, Kahn (1990) and Maslach et al. (2001) provided the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding employee engagement (Saks, 2005). The only study to date to empirically test Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of engagement found that all three of Kahn's (1990) original domains were "important in determining one's engagement at work" (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004, p. 30). This finding suggests the framework Kahn (1990) used in his conceptualization is foundational for the scaffolding of the construct.

Employee engagement may seem a relatively recent concept but actually it goes back over 20 years when the term first appeared in an academic journal in 1990. Prior to that, during the 70's and 80's, HR's (or as it was then 'personnel's') focus was on employee satisfaction. But this had little or no connection with performance and was more about the employee than the organisation or the employee's relationship with it. The focus then moved from satisfaction to commitment (and somewhere along the way 'personnel' became 'human resources,') in return for a job, and possibly a job for life, the employee would be loyal and commit himself to the organisation. Whilst commitment is an important element of and predictor of engagement it cannot replace engagement. But then things started to change. Increased global competition and the shift from a manufacturing economy to a service one meant employers needed to be more flexible, leaner and competitive. Traditional industries closed or were severely cut back and employees learned the hard way that there were no jobs for life, that to progress in their careers they too needed to be more flexible and move to where the opportunities were.

And that's what they did. The old contract of a job for life with a nice fat pension at the end of it was broken. People were free – encouraged even – to move from job to job, selling their skills and at the same time acquiring new ones courtesy of the new employer. Loyalty didn't come into it, or if it did it was more fleeting, more short term. So it benefited the employee but employers soon realised that actually they were losing people they didn't want to lose. It was costing them money and affecting their ability to compete effectively.

3.1 The rise of engagement

It is at this point in the story - during the ninteens - that the concept of engagement matured. Key to this was a paper published by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) in 1990 'From People to Profits, the HR link to the service-profit chain' which showed how employee attitudes and behaviour could improve customer retention and consequently sales performance. This clear link between engagement and performance, supported by extensive research, helped establish engagement's importance to both HR and business performance. The fact that the UK had become a service-based economy made the report's findings even more relevant and increased the focus on employees and their interaction with

customers. For service-based businesses, the old mantra that 'staff are your greatest asset' became 'staff are your only asset.' This led to greater incentives to invest in staff as the returns were seen as greater employee commitment, motivation, productivity and ultimately profit (or, in the case of not-for-profits, achieving strategic objectives). The business case for engagement was supported by another seminal study in 2002 which also showed the link between engaged employees and profit. What had back in 1990 been confined to predominantly academic circles was now being discussed and implemented at practitioner level. Organisations began to see the potential that engagement had to positively affect a whole raft of HR and business measures including employee retention, absenteeism and turnover; sales; profitability and customer service/satisfaction scores.

4. Conclusion

So Employee Engagement is different and unique construct which is employees emotional connection to organization and work. An engaged employee contributes to organization success going an extra mile. Eventhough it has evolved from various constructs it is unique in its nature with added characteristics of an engaged employee.

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