



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND HINDRANCES TO BE TACKLED BY HR PROFESSIONALS IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT The COVID 19 pandemic has caused havoc on people's lives, work situations, and general well-being. Not just on an individual's health, but also on the health of an organization, the pandemic's immense impact has been gloomy and horrific. Furthermore, due to long hours and minimal vacation time during the epidemic, hospital personnel, who were the most likely to infect COVID 19, began to lose faith in their employment. Employees were also vulnerable to mental stress as a result of the anxiety that comes with a variety of situations, such as illness, layoffs, and business closures. This article examines the value of employee participation by concentrating on new ideas, challenges, and solutions. It was based on five HR healthcare professionals from five multidisciplinary speciality hospitals in Chennai and Trichy who were interviewed over the phone. The results of interviews with healthcare HR professionals revealed that employee engagement is favourably and consistently linked to various organizational outcomes.

KEYWORDS : COVID 19, Employee Engagement, Healthcare, Human Resource

INTRODUCTION:

The COVID 19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the labour market in a way that has never been seen before. The present pandemic crisis has made things difficult for businesses, especially those in charge of human resources. (Carnevale, J. B.; Hatak, 2020). The beginning of the year 2020 has been bleak and gruesome. The disastrous intrusion of COVID-19 had a significant impact on the business world.

Employees were hit harder by this wave of shock. Everyone has witnessed one or more of these events, from illness to death, business losses to business closure, bonus denial, to layoffs. The COVID-19 issue has engulfed the globe. It impacts not only an individual's health but also an organization's overall health. Whereas many companies have been compelled to fire staff, current employees have shown a reduced degree of involvement. (Puneet Kumar, 2021).

The requirements and operational procedures for 'essential personnel' are in the process of being overhauled. Even though many of them were not obligated to take paid sick leave, the rate of them taking needless sick leave was high. Stressful situations have been imposed on essential workers, such as greater workloads, longer working hours, and shorter rest intervals. Furthermore, contracting the virus at work and spreading it to family members and others is a severe issue. Furthermore, layoffs, salary cuts, and furloughs increased job instability and economic loss, increasing worker anxiety. (De-la-Calle-Duran et al, 2021, Carnevale, J. B.; Hatak, 2020).

Employee engagement is a crucial factor in determining how well a company performs. Employee engagement is a positive, rewarding state of mind characterised by liveliness, devotion, and immersion in one's work. Engagement refers to a more constant and widespread affective-cognitive state that is not centred on any particular event, material, person, or behaviour, instead of a transitory and specific state. (International Labour Organization, 2020, Schaufeli, et al, 2002). Employee engagement is critical for hospital success; engaged service delivery promotes customer satisfaction and demonstrates the provider's commitment to the business. Customer satisfaction and employee engagement are both critical to the hospital's commercial performance.

Employee engagement in hospitals is crucial for the organization's performance, engaged service provision improves customer satisfaction and indicates the provider's support to the organization. These two – customer satisfaction and employee engagement are essential for the hospital's success in the market. HR managers are battling low employee engagement and trying to prevent employees from quitting. HR managers must examine their employee engagement initiatives from a fresh perspective to retain employees highly engaged during the pandemic's challenging era. (Puneet Kumar, 2021). Management is all about getting things done by others. To do so, one must first understand how to manage people; this study is being performed with interest in learning how Human Resource

professionals approach this global pandemic, managing essential and frontline workers, on whose shoulders the aid for humankind rests.

A study was conducted by interviewing Healthcare HR specialists to determine the research's primary need responses. In addition, a literature analysis was carried out to assist the research and identify the necessary entities to promote and maintain employee engagement relevant to this study.

OBJECTIVES:

To study the new initiatives taken by healthcare HR professionals during COVID 19 to maintain and improve employee engagement.

To identify the difficulties that healthcare HR professionals experience in managing employee engagement during the pandemic.

To ascertain out what steps healthcare HR experts are taking to overcome the obstacles.

REVIEW:

Related papers were gathered to further strengthen the study by providing a more profound knowledge of employee engagement, its importance, and other aspects. A search was conducted using DOAJ open access journal, Emerald open access journal, academia.edu.com, and Google Scholar.

Based on the literature review, the subjects related to employee engagement were identified. These subjects mentioned have a more significant impact on employee engagement. The search protocols and results were mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1: Search protocols and results

Documents searched	Based on Topic and Keywords
Data range	All years to 2021
Search terms	'Employee engagement', 'COVID-19', 'Healthcare industry', 'Hospitals', in various permutations and combinations.
Inclusion criteria	Article review
Filtered process	Not related to the topic
The final number of documents	26

Source: Primary data

Employee engagement is associated to retention, patient-centred service, a patient-safety culture, and personnel positive perceptions of the quality of care or services provided by their team. (Macey, W. H.; Schneider, 2008, Gibbons, J. and R. Schutt, 2010, Graham Lowe 2012) Employee engagement improves staff and patient satisfaction, improves patient care experiences, provides higher-quality services, and improves financial performance. Employees engaged are

dedicated to their employer, happy with their work, and willing to go above and beyond to help the organization achieve its goals. Other significant human resource objectives, such as retention, job performance, absenteeism, recruiting, and reputation, appear to be influenced by engagement. Retention, service quality, patient-centred care, and safety culture all benefit from employee involvement.

De-la-Calle- Durán, M.-C. et al (2021) conducted a study on the factors influencing employee engagement and found out that the following elements are essential for increasing and leveraging employee engagement. Even while businesses and organizations were aware of the importance and priority of these issues before the pandemic, the need to focus on them became apparent after the COVID 19 epidemic.

Conciliation: Conciliation is the process of balancing work and family life, which is becoming increasingly necessary as remote working and flexibility become more prevalent. Simply described, conciliation is the process of resolving a disagreement or conflict between two parties. Here it is about giving out employees' fair results with decision outcomes.

Cultivation: Cultivation is all about an environment in the workplace, providing space for opportunities, innovations, and employee development.

Confidence: Confidence is built on employee health and safety, as well as hands-on leadership. It means motivating employees through appropriate activities and ensuring employee trust in the company.

Compensation: Compensation entails rewarding employees' efforts and covering the additional costs associated with these difficult times.

Communication: It is critical to communicate decisions and the company's current situation regularly, listen to employees, and hear their ideas. Employee participation and engagement require effective communication.

Puneet Kumar (2021) conducted a study on the elements of employee engagement and found out that the following factors are crucial for increasing employee engagement during a global pandemic.

Value: considers the worth of employees' efforts, commitment, showing respect. Valuing and recognizing the employee leverages the support the employee provides.

Voice: Communication plays a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement. Providing employees with the opportunity to provide feedback and communicate opinions improves workers' involvement in achieving organizational goals.

Variety: Enforcing and utilizing creativity, innovation, and task diversity. As mentioned in (De- la- Calle- Durán, 2021), providing an appropriate environment, cultivating and supporting creativity, development, and introducing new tasks can stimulate employee interests, motivating and enhancing employee participation.

Virtue: Behaviour displaying high moral standards. It is the quality of being good moral, thus sustaining the highest moral principles of human beings.

Vision: Organization should have a clear, comprehensive goal. A well understandable and inspiring conceptualization gains the support of the employee.

By focusing on the author's five suggested elements, an organization can consider the level of employee engagement and improve its quantity and quality.

METHODOLOGY:

During COVID-19, this study focuses on HR methods for employee engagement in hospitals. We approached five HR professionals from five different corporate hospitals. One participant worked as a human resources manager in a corporate hospital in Trichy, and the other four worked in various corporate hospitals in Chennai. During the pandemic, a telephonic interview was done to gather information from HR experts. It was entirely up to the participants whether or not they wanted to take part in the study. Before the event, the assurance of maintaining identity confidentiality was offered. Participants had to be human resources professionals working in hospitals during the pandemic to be eligible for

the study. The interview was conducted with structured questions and was videotaped with the consent of the participants.

Limitations:

This study was performed via a telephonic interview with a small number of Healthcare HR specialists due to the pandemic scenario. However, it includes information on the methods used by five multispecialty corporate hospitals. During the pandemic, Healthcare HR experts working at corporate hospitals in Chennai and Trichy assisted with the research. The findings of this study are limited to only five hospitals. Thus, they cannot be generalized, but they are essential for healthcare HR professionals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following four study questions were asked to all HR personnel, and their responses were recorded and analysed.

RQ1. What are the new steps taken by the Human Resource professionals to maintain employee engagement?

RQ2. How do you evaluate the steps taken to enhance employee engagement?

RQ3. What are all the barriers a Human Resource professional faces in maintaining and improving employee engagement in the workplace during a pandemic?

RQ4. How do you overcome those barriers and the techniques you use?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The Five Healthcare Human resource professionals' responses for the Question Number 1 to 4 are given below:

Q.No.1. HR response on the New steps taken by the Human Resource professionals to maintain employee engagement:

HR 1 : Creating awareness, education and training programs, assigned with new assignments with different job role opportunities, workgroup allocation, flexible scheduling.

HR 2: Communication, grievance redressal systems, Proper protocols and standard operative procedures, PPE and awareness, employee welfare benefits.

HR 3: Work allotment in shifts, Employee help and support of the hospital was reassured.

HR 4: Strict standard operative measures, e-services to minimize the workload.

HR 5: Welfare benefits, medical treatment facility benefits to the employee and their family, transportation arrangements, helping employees to cope up with their mental well-being, evaluating the latest practices.

Q.No.2: HR response Evaluate the Steps Taken To Enhance Employee Engagement

Human resource professionals responses for Q.No.2 How do you evaluate the steps taken to enhance employee engagement? are given below

HR1: Customer service feedback, customer satisfaction, fewer errors and lower absenteeism rate.

HR 2: Profitability and productivity, turnover ratio.

HR 3: The length of stay, targets achievement, conflict management and evaluating team working skills, Feedback and grievance control systems were frequently analysed.

HR4: Lack of motivation and interest, workload.

HR5: Lesser the rate of absenteeism and prompt presence to the work, productivity.

Q.No.3: HR response on barriers to be tackled by the HR in enhancing employee engagement

HR1: Lack of motivation and interest, fear of contracting the infection.

HR2: Lack of interest, fear of exposure and struggle to reach to work during lockdown restrictions.

HR3: Lack of motivation.

HR4: Lack of motivation and interest, workload.

HR5: Lack of motivation, transportation hindrances and lockdown, the uncertainty of job- and job-related insecurities

Q.No.4: HR responses on Techniques used to overcome these barriers

HR1: Providing COVID duty allowance, day-offs, and if they contract the infection, medical support, insurance claim, payment waivers.

HR2: Online get-togethers, family meetings, awarding for being punctual & full attendance, transport facilities, online awareness programs, education and training programs.

HR3: Motivation to achieve targets and create benchmarks, welfare benefits.

HR4: The root cause of problems was found and observed; counselling training, scheduling and allocating shifts.

HR5: Appreciation and recognition, conducting online functions and programs, encouraging the supervisors or team leaders to inspire their

employees, communication and transparency.

Analysing the answers of all the Healthcare Human Resource professionals to the research questions, the following answers those found common among the responses:

MAJOR FINDINGS:

Table 2: Challenges Of HR Professionals For Maintaining Employee Engagement During COVID 19

Research Questions	The common opinion of all five HR	Outcome	Challenge
RQ1: New steps taken by the human resource professionals to maintain employee engagement	Increasing employee awareness through education and training, personal protective measures, policies and procedures, employee welfare measures, and providing other benefits such as transportation during lockdown restrictions, travel passes, and work-from-home benefits.	Able to achieve employee job satisfaction and improve employee's trust over the organization.	Resistance to the new changes and adaptations, Stress due to the fear of infection was still a problem in maintaining employee engagement.
RQ2: Measures through which the new steps taken were evaluated:	Profitability, productivity, absenteeism, fewer errors.	Engaged employees and their improved performance with fewer errors and fewer to zero absent days will increase productivity, customer satisfaction, and, as a result, the firm's profitability.	It is a significant challenge to evaluate how to best use resources such as time, people, equipment, inventory, and money to serve the business.
RQ3: Barriers faced by a human resource professional in maintaining and improving employee engagement in the workplace:	Lack of interest, fear of exposure to infection and spreading it to family, workload, tackling with the lockdown restrictions.	Even after the new steps were implemented, the employees encountered problems and issues that prevented them from being fully engaged in their work.	The majority of the barriers were not openly stated, making it difficult for HR professionals to determine the root cause of these barriers.
RQ4: Methods/ techniques used to tackle those barriers:	Assigning new tasks, providing proper education and training, Scheduling, allocation of tasks, assessment and reporting, Helping and supporting employees during lockdown and travel restrictions, work allotment and flexibility with work timings.	Assigning a variety of tasks aided in motivating employees to complete their responsibilities. Employee welfare benefits and a support structure helped employees cope with anxiety and stress during difficult times.	Inadequate workforce and healthcare professionals. Employees may be granted a set number of paid holidays. Healthcare workers ought to be available at work to help the country combat the pandemic. Working from home is practically impossible in the healthcare industry, even for administrative workers. business.

Source: Primary data

SUGGESTIONS:

- All healthcare firms must make increasing employee engagement a strategic priority. Organizations must recognize the importance of focusing on employee engagement and commitment (affective commitment), which is critical for an organization's growth.
- Affective commitment - When an employee expresses a desire to stay with the organization. For the employee to desire to stay in the organization, the organization should support the employee and focus on building a happy work environment. Supporting employees during difficult times, creating employee trust, listening to employee needs, and restoring employee faith in the organization are all ways to keep employees committed.
- In healthcare systems, more human resources efforts are needed, and more research into new policies and practices for human resources will benefit people around the globe.

CONCLUSION:

This survey of hospital employees provides an excellent opportunity to learn more about the complexities of healthcare employee engagement. Employee engagement and organizational performance are found to be linked constantly and robustly. This study gives an overview of hospital Human Resource Management methods, focusing on staff engagement. Through interviews with five healthcare HR specialists, the Human Resource Management methods of five different multispecialty corporate hospitals are explored.

Overall, all healthcare businesses must make increasing employee engagement a strategic aim. Employees that are highly engaged not only trust their organization but can also increase their work performance, feel valued, have clear career goals, and have a sense of belonging to a team. The results of interviews with healthcare HR professionals revealed that employee engagement is favourably and consistently linked to various organizational outcomes. Although the study may not entirely represent all Human Resource practices in all of Chennai's and Trichy's hospitals, it provides information that Healthcare HR practitioners may find beneficial. Many healthcare institutions worldwide are paying more attention to human resource management (HRM), which has risen during the pandemic. In the distribution of health care personnel, human resource management is

critical. Human resource experts understood the importance of fostering a culture that allows a company to fulfil its goals (Stefane M Kabene, et al, 2006).

The link between human resource management and health care is complicated. The relationship between human resource management and health care is complicated. Because all medical services are provided by and to people, a thorough understanding of human resource policies is crucial to the success of any health care programme. They recognised how networks of practise may form around shared goals and interests, and how critical it is to integrate these with the organization's aims and interests in order to enhance employee engagement.

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