

Review Paper:

Aspects of Employee Engagement: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Employees that are motivated and engaged contribute more to organisational productivity and help to maintain a higher level of commitment, which leads to improved customer satisfaction. Employee engagement refers to an employee's level of dedication and connection with their company and its principles. An engaged employee is aware of the company's surroundings and works with coworkers to improve job performance for the company's advantage. Employees have a favourable attitude toward the organisation and its ideals are said to have a positive attitude. The paper concentrates on many aspects of employee engagement including definitions and frameworks.

The purpose of this study is to comprehend the basic notion of employee engagement and to investigate the many characteristics of employee engagement through a literature review. This study is based on a review of the literature as well as secondary data gathered from a variety of sources including websites, journals, magazines, newspapers and reference books. A review of the literature revealed previous studies in this field.

Keyword: Employees, Engagement, Attitude.

Introduction

Employee engagement is an assessment of how satisfied employees are with their jobs, working environment and performance levels. Managing good employee morale can be extremely beneficial to any company, as actively engaged employees are more productive and loyal to the company. Organizations that have high levels of employee engagement are more productive and lucrative than those that have low levels of employee engagement.

Definition of Employee Engagement

Numerous definitions have been derived from experience and study since its inception. The word "employee engagement" has yet to be given a universally agreed definition.

Employees can be engaged on one dimension but not the other, according to Kahn⁷. However, the higher is the level of employee engagement, the more engaged the person is on each dimension. The engagement construct was first articulated by Maslach and Leiter as the polar opposite of burnout (i.e. someone who is not experiencing job burnout

must be engaged in their job.) Kahn's study on employee engagement was expanded upon by Luthans and Peterson which provides a convergent theory for Gallup's empirically derived employee engagement. They opined that that to be emotionally involved, one must create meaningful connections with others and feel empathy for them. Those that are intellectually engaged, on the other hand, are vividly aware of their mission and position in their profession.

Similarly, active participation was defined by Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir as a high level of action, initiative and responsibility. Schaufeli et al defined employee engagement as "a positive fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption". They go on to say that engagement is "a more permanent and pervasive emotional – cognitive state that is not focused on any particular item, event, individual, or activity," rather than being "a brief and unique state.

Harter, Schmidt and Hayes defined employee engagement as the individual involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work. Hewitt defines employee engagement as the employees desire to say (speak positively about the organization), stay (desire to be a member of the organization) and strive (go beyond the expected for the organization). Mount, Harter, Witt and Barrick defined engagement in terms of a "high internal motivational state.

Wellins and Concelman suggest that "Employee engagement is the illusive force that motivates employees to higher levels of performance. This sought-after energy is a mix of dedication, devotion, productivity and ownership." They further added that it includes "feelings and attitudes employees have towards their jobs and their organization."⁸ Robinson, Perryman and Hayday¹⁹, defined "engagement as a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization". Lucey, Bateman and Hines have deciphered that "Employee Engagement is how each individual connects with the company and the customers".

Development Dimensions International (DDI) defines Employee Engagement as "the extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do." "Macey and Schneider looked at engagement attitudinally and behaviorally. They differentiated between three types of employee involvement: state, trait and behavioural engagement. Sarkar opined that Employee engagement is a

metric that measures a person's connection to the organisation. Perrin's Global Workforce Study uses the definition "employees' willingness and ability to help their company succeed, largely by providing discretionary effort on a sustainable basis." According to the study, a range of factors influence involvement, including both emotional and intellectual components of work, as well as the overall work experience.

Employee engagement is defined by the Gallup organisation as involvement in and excitement for work. Gallup as cited by Dernovsek likens employee engagement to a positive employees' emotional attachment and employees' commitment. Robinson et al¹⁹ define employee engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee understands the business environment and collaborates with coworkers to improve job performance for the benefit of the company. The company must work to foster and grow employee engagement, which necessitates a two-way connection between the employer and the employee." This conclusion and definition provided by the Institute of Employment Studies demonstrates that employee engagement is the consequence of a two-way connection between the employer and the employee, emphasising that both sides have responsibilities.

Employee contentment is not the same as employee engagement, according to Fernandez, who contends that since managers cannot rely on employee satisfaction to help retain the best and brightest, employee engagement becomes an important notion. Other researchers consider job satisfaction to be a part of engagement, but it can simply reflect a transactional relationship that is only as good as the organization's most recent round of perks and bonuses; engagement is about passion and commitment—the willingness to invest oneself and expand one's discretionary effort to help the employer succeed, which goes beyond simple job satisfaction or basic loyalty to the employer.

As a result, aligning maximum job satisfaction and maximum job contribution yield the whole engagement equation. Stephen Young, the executive director of Towers Perrin, likewise makes a distinction between work satisfaction and engagement, arguing that only engagement (not satisfaction) is the most powerful predictor of organisational performance.

Importance of Employee Engagement

Employees are an asset to an organization. Using the organization's intellectual capital has become an important source of competitive advantage. One way organizations can successfully navigate these challenges and capitalize on their intellectual capital is to foster employee engagement. Employees who are engaged are energised and enthusiastic about their jobs. Excitement, enthusiasm and productivity are all associated with passion. It is in the self-interest of an organisation to develop wealth as quickly as an unhappy

individual can destroy it.

Employees who are engaged are devoted, driven, energetic and enthusiastic about solving problems. They are absorbed in their work, put their hearts into their tasks, are enthusiastic about doing a good job, expend energy in their work and provide their staff with a competitive advantage. Each individual employee has direct and unilateral control over amount of discretionary effort he or she chose to make available to the organization. A motivated employee will continually outperform and set new benchmarks for themselves.

According to a poll performed by Towers Perrin what drives employee engagement is when a firm aligns its programmes and activities within its framework to drive the proper behaviour from employees to consumers; it is positioned to generate an adequate return on people investment. When a firm builds its people programmes in a strategic and operational vacuum, with no explicit or implicit links between behaviour and investment, the company's ROI, profitability and customer retention suffer. Competitive pay, work-life balance, advancement opportunities, competitive benefits, challenging work, merit pay, learning and development opportunities, competitive retirement benefits, coworker quality and a reputable employer are all factors that influence employee engagement, according to this report.

As demonstrated in a study of hotel and restaurant service quality by Salanova, Agut and Peiro, the employee's level of job engagement, measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale²¹ predicted the overall service climate of the organization, which in turn predicted employee performance and customer loyalty. According to Corporate Leadership Council (2004), employees who are engaged are more inclined to put up extra effort and improve their own performance. They are less susceptible to cynicism and fatigue.

After performing comprehensive studies, consulting company Watson Wyatt concluded that employees having a higher line of sight are likely to make 18 percent more earnings. In 2006, Towers Perrin performed another intriguing survey of 664,000 employees from various nations; the results demonstrated that higher levels of employee engagement resulted in improved financial outcomes for companies in terms of operational income, net income and earnings per share. According to the data, companies with high levels of employee engagement saw a 19.2 percent increase in operating income over the past year, while those with low levels of employee engagement saw a 32.7 percent drop in operating income. A highly engaged workforce contributed to a 13.7 percent gain in net income, compared to a 3.8 percent fall for similar organisations. In another measure, companies with highly engaged employees had a 27.8% increase in earnings per share compared to an 11.2 percent decrease in companies without highly engaged

employees.

Gallup looked over 24,000 firms and compared financial performance in the top quartile and lowest quartile with engagement scores. Employee turnover was 31-51 percent higher in organisations with engagement scores in the bottom quartile, inventory shrinkage was 51 percent higher and employee accidents were 62 percent higher. Those in the top quartile of involvement had 12 percent more customer advocacy, 18 percent higher productivity and 12 percent higher profitability on average.

In May 2011, Sarkar published a study on employee engagement strategies in the manufacturing sector which found that engaged people are drivers of good production and customer happiness. She claims that the most likely benefits of having engaged employees in a company include lower attrition rates, employee support during a business downturn, lower absenteeism and employees becoming brand ambassadors for the company.

Employee-Engagement: A Conceptual Framework: According to Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, frameworks enable researchers to bring together and make sense of ideas, concepts and variables that impact on research outcomes in a logical manner: the framework addresses the interrelationships between the concepts and/or variables that are regarded to be crucial to the dynamics of the scenario under investigation. The framework's supporting structure explains how the researcher would interpret the data in order to study the topic. The major frameworks in employee engagement research are distinct in this supportive role and are identified in the following seven categories:

The Well-Being Approach: Under the umbrella term "well-being," Schaufeli et al²¹⁻²³ explored engagement and disengagement. The higher-order notion of involvement and disengagement was defined as well-being. Well-being is defined as an employee's positive emotional state and is divided into two dimensions: activation and identification. This builds upon the taxonomy of the independent dimensions of activation and pleasure introduced by Watson and Telling. The term "activation" refers to a range of human emotions ranging from tiredness to vigour. On the other hand, identification encompasses a wide spectrum of attitudes from scepticism to commitment. These factors, taken together, can indicate either engagement or burnout. As a result, the well-being concept is linked to positive psychology and the burnout/engagement dichotomy.

In the examination of engagement, the Gallup Institute employed a well-being perspective as well. Employee well-being is defined as employee involvement, according to the researchers. Gallup researchers employed the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) also known as the Q12, to determine whether employees were engaged, disengaged, or "not engaged" at work. The difference between the two frameworks is based on the type of involvement that the

researchers looked into. Schaufeli et al²¹⁻²³ were interested in work engagement, whereas Harter et al were interested in employee engagement in its broadest sense.

Luthans and Peterson's research contribution in support of the GWA discovered that the GWA conceptually fitted some of Kahn's notions that personal engagement is the degree of self, a person presents in their job responsibilities. People can express themselves in a variety of ways including physical, emotional and cognitive engagement. The GWA, according to Luthans and Peterson, corresponded to emotional and cognitive involvement. A fresh method of thinking about and studying involvement is suggested by the well-being approach. It specifically mentions a link between burnout/duality and the positive psychology framework.

Burnout-Engagement Duality and Positive Psychology: Freudenberger coined the phrase "burn-out," which was followed by Maslach's important work⁹. Burn-out, according to Freudenberger, is characterised by feelings of drowsiness and exhaustion from one's labour. From the burnout literature, Maslach and Leiter⁹ developed an engagement framework, recognising the concepts of energy, involvement and professional efficacy as engagement. In other words, they felt that if you are actively involved in your work, you will have a lot of energy, involvement and professional efficacy.

Exhaustion, cynicism and a lack of professional efficacy are three engagement characteristics that reflect opposite scores on the three burnout elements: exhaustion, cynicism and a lack of professional efficacy. Employees who scored low on cynicism and tiredness while scoring high on lack of efficacy were considered engaged. A high activation and identification score would likewise imply a high rating on the well-being framework's activation and identification dimension²¹. Schaufeli et al²¹⁻²³ established a counter engagement scale to extend the idea of engagement and burnout. Their study took a positive psychology approach and a well-being paradigm, focusing on the positive components of good human functioning rather than the negative parts.

Despite Maslach and Leiter's⁹ claim that burnout and engagement are diametrically opposed, burnout is not the exact antithesis of engagement. Instead, according to Schaufeli et al²¹, engagement and burnout should be examined independently of one another. Burnout is defined as the "erosion of engagement in the job" from a positive psychology perspective with a specific focus on overall well-being. In this topic, research has focused on the engagement qualities of vigour, dedication and absorption. Employees that obtain good ratings across the board are more likely to be engaged.

The Job Demands and Resources Model: Llorens et al suggested an alternative framework for employee engagement using a "task demands resources model" to

explain engagement following similar work by Demerouti et al. This model has been used to describe how the working environment of employees affects their health and dedication to the company. The model suggests that job demands and job resources might have a combined effect on the development of burnout in people, influencing both weariness and disengagement. "Physical, social and organisational components of the job that require persistent physical and/or mental effort and are connected with physiological and psychological consequences," according to occupational demands.

In contrast, resources are defined as "physical, social, or organisational features of the job that are functional in attaining work goals, decreasing working pressures, or encouraging human growth, learning and development". This could include, for example, having support systems, job control and autonomy and performance feedback^{3,4}. When job demands and resources are ideal, they have an effect on employee motivation, resulting in increased engagement.

Excessive job demands have been specifically linked with burnout and negative aspects of exhaustion and disengagement and job resources have been described as the start of the motivational process with engagement being the end result³. According to Schaufeli and colleagues, the job demands and resources frameworks investigate work engagement and are limited to work engagement research. This approach examines involvement as a precursor rather than engagement as a state.

The Depletion and Enrichment Framework: Rothbard presents a paradigm for studying role involvement that employs a depletion or enrichment approach. According to the depletion paradigm, multiple encounters may result in people having a "bad emotional response to that stance". In other words, having many roles can place additional demands, obligations and pressure on an individual resulting in strain, stress and unpleasant reactions. The enrichment framework (role accumulation), according to Rothbard, means that playing diverse roles can have a sustaining and enriching influence on the individual, resulting in joyful experiences. The role enrichment (accumulation) paradigm, like earlier frameworks, shares some parallels with the well-being approach. There is a focus on a greater sense of self in the positive and individually one feels fulfilled and valued.

Employee engagement, according to Rothbard, is defined by the amount of time and attention employees devote to their jobs. Attention is defined in this context as the amount of time spent thinking about and concentrating on the role. According to Rothbard, absorption is the intensity of one's focus that reflects an emotional notion. Absorption is also linked to concepts first suggested by Goffman and Kahn⁷ explaining the state of integrating oneself in role. According to Schaufeli and Bakker²¹, engagement has a proponent, absorption, which is the state of being completely concentrated and engrossed in a function. The engagement

proposed by Schaufeli and Bakker²¹ is consistent with that provided by Rothbard, according to Mauno, Kinnunen and Ruokolainen.

These theories imply that all absorption propositions are essentially the same and correspond to the same emotional experience. Although the research focused on whether people were personally connected or disengaged at work, Kahn⁷ maintained that absorption was also a condition of involvement (expressed physically, cognitively and emotionally). As a result, self-engagement can be differentiated in a number of ways.

Social Exchange Theory: Saks²⁰ proposed a different engagement strategy based on social exchange theory. According to the social exchange theory when relationships develop, a sense of loyalty, as well as enhanced trust and commitment evolves. Saks²⁰ found that "obligations are generated through a series of encounters between persons who are in a position of reciprocal interdependence." According to social exchange theory, exchanges frequently result in tasks being transferred from one person to another. For example, the company will provide the financial resources required for the employee to continue working for the company. The employee is likely to reciprocate, according to social exchange theory.

According to Saks²⁰, the form of reciprocation would be devotion to the job or organisation. Saks²⁰ acknowledges, using Kahn's⁷ notion that employees are reciprocating by delivering higher levels of involvement to their work or company. They are putting more effort into their jobs. Homans' work inspired the concept of social exchange theory which interpreted people's social interactions as a form of reciprocal exchange. In addition, Gouldner stated that people develop reciprocation criteria based on how others' labour is reciprocated. This might influence how a person behaves in social circumstances. We reward people for their efforts and as individuals, we set norms that will guide our future reciprocal behaviour.

Saks²⁰ developed his own work and organisational engagement measures that reflected psychological presence at work. Both scales measured only one component. This contrasts with some of the other scales, which depict participation as a variety of constructs. Saks²⁰ has proposed a new concept of involvement, one that incorporates Kahn's⁷ psychological presence which manifests cognitively, physically and emotionally.

The Consultant Frameworks: Consultant frameworks are sold as a purchasing product to organisations and consultants sell a service. This is significant since they frequently lack the academic rigour found in management and psychology. They are, nonetheless, relevant to the issue. By examining the concept of participation, they can contribute to a deeper understanding of the contrasts and similarities between other academic systems. In the consultant contributions to the

work on engagement, the emotional components of dominant frameworks are emphasised.

Consultant contributions typically include the word "employee engagement," as the service they are delivering explicitly targets employee potential. The Towers Perrin concept is fundamentally an emotional/rational engagement dualism. This dichotomy implies that the emotional parts of engagement are the feelings that employees have about their jobs, or their own feelings about their jobs. Rational engagement is also known as rational endurance and it comprises factors related to working towards organisational goals; getting the job done, linking individual activities to company goals, objectives and success. Similarly, the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC) provides a similar structure, but the criteria are renamed: emotional and rational commitment.

The shift in wording from "engagement" to "commitment" may not be significant to the consulting industry, but academically, a clear distinction should be made between engagement and commitment, according to Hallberg and Schaufeli. This is consistent with Rothbard's conclusions and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's examination of this distinction. Including commitment ideas is also congruent with Hewitt and Associates², who define engagement as emotional and intellectual commitments to the organisation. Again, their methodology does not distinguish between engagement and commitment. This is troublesome for engagement researchers since there is a lack of clarity.

The ISR (2004a, 2004b and 2004c) provide a framework of engagement that encompasses cognitive, affective and behavioral components. They term this thinking, feeling and acting respectively. Thinking incorporates the belief in and support for the goals and values of the organization, the affective or the "feeling" aspect refers to developing a sense of belonging and attachment to and pride in the organization. The behavioral or, acting aspects comprise two elements: putting in the extra effort for the benefit of the organization and an intention to remain with the organization.

There are many similarities drawn between the various consultant contributions and they are essentially simplistic frameworks for the purpose of enhancing the commercial value of their service. Nevertheless, the consultant contributions do provide guiding frameworks for the investigation of engagement, as they also have similarities with the academic frameworks.

Job Involvement Framework: Lodahl and Kejner were the first to observe and present the phenomena of job engagement by addressing various data on the impact of job design factors on job participation. Job participation is the worth and relevance that an individual places on his current job. According to Reitz and Jewell, job participation is related to the relevance of work in an individual's routine or daily life. Individuals who place a high value on their work

develop a strong attachment to their jobs as well as to their organisations and their performance suffers as a result. Additional job factors can influence an individual's level of involvement in his employment. When employees are enthusiastic about their jobs, they are more engaged at work.

It was proposed in job characteristics model (JCM) that features of job can affect the job involvement because these features may encourage the internal motivation of employees. From an individual employee perspective, job involvement is significant to individual's own growth and satisfaction within the work environment as motivation and attitude directed to goal also argued that through job design, job involvement could be increased. Job involvement is defined as the degree to which the job situation is central to the person and his or her identity. Kanungo 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 form a cognitive judgment about the needs satisfying abilities of the job. Past research has also demonstrated that job involvement has been related to job characteristics such as task autonomy, task significance, task identity, skill variety and feedback and supervisory behaviors such as leader consideration, participative decision making and amount of communication.

Dimensions of Employee Engagement

According to Deci and Ryan, management that fosters a supportive work environment shows concern for employees' needs and feelings, provides positive feedback and encourages people to voice their concerns, develops new skills and solves job-related difficulties. According to Purcell¹⁶, employee participation is only significant if there is a more genuine sharing of responsibility between management and employees on substantive concerns. His research also indicated that involvement in decisions impacting the job or task was strongly connected with high levels of employee engagement, suggesting that it is a key driver.

Employee voice, as defined by Lucas et al, is the ability for employees to have a say in how corporate decisions are made. According to Robinson et al¹⁹, feeling acknowledged and involved is a critical driver of engagement. Under the umbrella of feeling valued and involved, a multitude of factors impact the amount to which an employee feels valued and involved and so engaged. According to Robinson et al¹⁹, this can be a useful indicator for organisations as to which aspects of work life require significant attention if engagement levels are to be maintained or increased.

Penna proposes a hierarchical engagement approach. Employees who use this method may be looking for "meaning" at work. Penna defines "meaning" as "work

fulfilment." Employees are fulfilled when they are valued and recognised, when they have a feeling of belonging to the organisation and when they believe they are contributing, all of which are consistent with Robinson's theoretical framework. According to Penna, the organisation becomes more enticing to new potential employees and more engaging to current employees.

According to Robinson et al¹⁹, there is strong evidence that many people are underutilised in the workplace because they are not involved in work-related decisions. According to Beardwell and Claydon, employee participation is a key component of "soft HRM," which focuses on gathering employees' ideas and ensuring their commitment. Employee involvement, opponents argue, puts management in charge while giving employees little real influence. According to Lawler and Worley, in order for a high-involvement work practise to be effective and have a positive impact on employee engagement, employees must be given power.

Perception, according to Buchanan and Huczynski, is a dynamic psychological process that involves the attention, organisation and interpretation of sensory information. People categorise and make meaning of events and situations based on their own unique frame of reference, which reflects their personality, past experiences, knowledge, expectations and current needs, priorities and interests, according to Robinson et al¹⁹.

Employee engagement, according to May et al¹¹, is linked to emotional experiences and well-being. Feelings, according to Wilson, link us to our realities and provide internal input on how we are doing, what we want and what we might do next... Worry, envy, hurt, sadness, boredom, enthusiasm and other emotions are commonplace in companies.

According to Schaufeli and Bakker²¹, engaged employees have a stronger link with their employer and are less likely to leave. Engaged employees, according to Truss et al, are less likely to leave their organisation. They determined that emotional elements influence an individual's sense of personal fulfilment as well as their sense of inspiration and affirmation from their profession and being a member of their organisation.

Moore and Crabtree discovered a relationship between work-related and familial stress. According to Robinson et al¹⁹, employee engagement may be achieved by providing an organisational climate that generates positive feelings such as involvement and pride resulting in stronger organisational performance, decreased employee turnover and better health.

Conclusion

Employee engagement is linked to the emotional, cognitive and physical aspects of work as well as how these characteristics are integrated. Employee engagement should not be thought of as just another HR strategy. Employee

engagement is a long-term process linked to the company's fundamental principles, culture and management philosophy. Employees must adapt to a working environment that promotes them to display the desired behaviours.

A company must promote characteristics that increase participation in all of its commercial activities. Following the analysis of the data, it can be stated that high levels of employee engagement can lead to higher employee commitment and involvement in their jobs, resulting in a motivated workforce that will work together to achieve the organization's common goals.

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