Employee Engagement Practices – Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is generally the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards his or her organization and its core values and beliefs. An engaged employee is presumed to be aware of business context, and work dynamics with colleagues and peer groups to improve performance within the job for the benefit and excellence of the organization. It is a positive attitude held by the employees towards the organization and its values. Hence there is a greater urgency for HR professionals to focus more attention on not only retaining the work force, but also keeping them actively engaged. This paper focuses on various engagement practices that are observed in Indian corporate companies.

KEYWORDS

Employee Engagement, Disengagement, Performance, Productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is an individual's sense of purpose, evident to others in the display of personal initiative, effort, and persistence directed towards organizational goals. Today, employee engagement has become a critical element for business performance and success. Engaged employees are happy, they perform better and have stability. For past several years, 'Employee Engagement' has been a hot topic in the corporate circles. It is a buzz word that employers think they understand, but face difficulties and challenges while practicing. Many organizations copy 'Employee Engagement' activities from the best practices, looking at the benefits enjoyed by their competitors? However, most lose track after a few strides ahead. 'Employee Engagement' cannot be a cosmetic intervention in enhancing commitment towards job, motivation or productivity. Corporate culture has an important role in enduring positive impact of such engagement programs. Employee engagement has a direct impact on the employee's productivity. Understandably, the most productive employees are those that are not only committed and loyal? but also but also those whose outputs are healthy and gratifying both for themselves as well as for the organization they work for (Soni, 2013).

CONCEPT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Kahn (1990) was credited with conceptualizing the term personal engagement which he defines as ‘the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances” . Kahn’s study started with the work of Goffman (1961), as well as looking across disciplines such as psychology, sociology and group theorists who all documented the natural resistance of an individual, concerning becoming a member of on-going groups and systems. The individual seeks to prevent total isolation or engulfment by being in a constant state of flux towards and away from the group (Kahn
1990). Kahn named this forward and backward flux as ‘personal engagement’ and ‘personal disengagement’.

The cognitive aspect of employee engagement deals with the employees beliefs about organization factors such as, how it is led, by whom and the working conditions which exist within the organization. The emotional element deals with how the employee feels about each of the three aforementioned factors and if they possess a positive or negative attitude towards the organization and its leader. The physical aspect of Kahn’s definition relates to the physical energies employed by individuals in order to carry out their organizational roles.

The literature concerning employee engagement poses a challenge due to the fact that there is no one universally applied definition to cover the topic of employee engagement. According to Baumruk (2004) employee engagement has been defined within the confines of emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization or the quantity of discretionary effort, defined by Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984), as the voluntary effort employees provide above and beyond what is required by employees in their job. From Kahn’s definition it is clear that employee engagement is a multi-faceted paradigm. The multi-dimensional approach to looking at engagement comes from the perspective that Kahn took on the individual’s working experience. Kahn (1990) argued that the work of Goffman (1961) only concentrated on momentary face-to-face meetings, whereas an altered concept needed to be developed which would transcend appropriately into organizational life, which is, according to Diamond & Allcorn (1985), ‘on-going, emotionally charged and psychologically complex’. Truss et al (2006), define employee engagement as a ‘passion for work’, which encompasses the three elements of engagement, previously discussed by Kahn (1990) in one psychological state.

Due to the varying definitions of employee engagement, the results of different studies become difficult to examine. This is because each study may look at the subject of employee engagement through a different lens, depending on the definition they decide upon. According to Ferguson (2007), with a universal definition of employee engagement lacking, it cannot be accurately defined and thus it cannot be measured and thus managed. According to Robinson et al (2004), while it has been noted that employee engagement has been defined in numerous ways, a number of those definitions within their construct are similar to more established con-structural definitions relating to organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Robinson et al (2004) define engagement as ‘one step up from commitment which begs the question, is employee engagement just old wine in a new bottle’?

Saks (2006) argues that employee engagement differs from organizational commitment (OC) on the grounds that OC represents a person’s attitude and connection concerning their organization, while on the other hand, engagement is more than an attitude, it is how psychologically, cognitively and behaviorally employed the individual is in their role, displayed by how attentive they are to their work and how absorbed the individual is in the performance of the role. Employee engagement also differs from OCB, as engagement is concerned with the passion for one’s role, while OCB is concerned with extra-role and voluntary behavior.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN INDIAN CONTEXT

At Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), senior executives guide team members coming up with innovative solutions to work-related issues / problems. This has resulted in development of a number of useful products that have resulted in successful business endeavors. TCS, which has diverse teams working in different geographic locations in different cultures, created the 'Ultimax' platform an online forum, where employees across levels and geographies can come together.
At Bharti Airtel Ltd, the new joiners & the best performers for the month are rewarded with a special dinner / lunch with their Chief Operations Officer.

Aditya Birla Group regularly monitors employee engagement at all levels across the group through the biennial organization health study (OHS), which is led by the chairman. It gives employees a unique opportunity to anonymously and frankly express their opinions on a range of issues. The Aditya Birla Awards for Outstanding Achievement - has also been a key engagement factor. During the awards, a number of Groupwide competitions are conducted. Over the years, competitions like ‘Vision 2015, Oh! Not So Smart’, Aditya Birla Group value leaders' poll, etc, have been conducted. These competitions are open to all employees of the group. Aditya Birla Group has a single portal which provides various job opportunities across levels, businesses and geographical locations of the Group. Aditya Birla Group also has opened up various learning opportunities like a) Gyanodaya, the Group varsity for management learning: Herein the managers participate in managerial and strategy programs conducted by the leading academics. b) The virtual campus work to support the 'Elearners'. Over 250 online courses spanning areas such as leadership, sales, marketing and engineering are available on the learning network.(Soni, 2013).

Indian Hotels, which operates the Taj chain of hotels, has been able to create a culture where the performance of employees is measured on customer Orientation efforts and the guidance given by senior leaders.

A prime example of employee engagement in Tata Motors is Tata club at Jamshedpur, which serves as a gathering point for employees and their families as they come together, network and have fun. The Community Development Centres (CDCs) have also been established across India to merge family values into Tata Motors organizational culture. To promote the value of education and to highlight the achievements of employee's children, merit awards are given in academics, sports & extracurricular activities. The artistic talent of the employees is nurtured through Kalasagar and Kalasangam – Tata Motors Cultural group. They arrange various cultural events on music, drama, dance and other activities to promote creativity among employees and their families.

Hindustan Unilever Ltd.’s sales people fan out over the country, bringing shampoo and ice cream cones to one-sixth of the world's population. HUL realized that a cyclical feedback system is good for sales managers and the salespeople they manage. HUL believes that "Ownership of engagement really goes to the manager". In the recent past, HUL managers underwent intense engagement training with Gallup consultants? and also reviewed each individual's followup action plan. Then they went to different locations to talk to salespeople individually.

Vodafone has implemented a new model of 'customer centricity' to drive improved customer and employee satisfaction. The Vodafone Way is modeled on three key tenets: Speed, Simplicity & Trust? with line managers being held accountable for team engagement with performance measures and providing them with tools and plans to drive performance by giving employees clear goals and a customer/client focus - and thereby achieving increased levels of productivity and innovation even in the downturn.

In Godrej, the Company's motto is 'take yourself lightly and take your job and your responsibilities seriously'. They believe real fun at work implies that 'Work itself is fun'. In Godrej and Boyce, there are various initiatives that have been taken up by practically all the divisions and Corporate HR. Each Divisional Personnel Head organizes some fun initiatives for the division like Birthday celebrations, Annual get-togethers, Department picnics, Attendance / Retirement functions, Festive dress codes, Dasera / Diwali celebrations, online quizzes, Saturday casual dressing, Learning and Sharing day, Team Lunches/ Movies, Sense of Humour, Lights Off Day, Wall of fame to
announce Employee of the Quarter/Month. Some divisions also have clip boards for pasting jokes, cartoons and job related updates.

Tata AIG General Insurance Co. Ltd commemorate individual and team achievements by organizing a fun filled evening for the employees. Employee TownHall is an event where the head of the organization addresses and interacts with all employees giving them an insight about the company's progress and unfolding the way forward. Interdepartmental cricket & football matches organized every year for sports enthusiasts helps foster a spirit of teamwork. World of Work (WOW) is another event when employees' children are invited to come and spend time at their parents' workplace (Soni, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Acquiring skilled workforce is just not enough in today's changing economy like ours; instead a lot needs to be done to retain, involve and make them committed to the organization and its goals. Thus, engagement is a state where an individual is not only intellectually committed but has great emotional attachment with his/her job that goes above and beyond the call of duty so as to further the interest of the company.(Singh, 2012). Hence one can conclude that the importance of employee engagement in the organizational setting is undeniable. Employee engagement emphasizes the importance of employee communication on the success of a business.

An organization should thus recognize employees, more than any other variable, as powerful contributors to a company's competitive position. Therefore employee engagement should be a continuous process of learning, improvement, measurement and action. We would hence conclude that raising and maintaining employee engagement lies in the hands of an organization and requires a perfect blend of time, effort, commitment and investment to craft a successful endeavor.

REFERENCES


