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Creating Employee Engagement in Organizations in India: Role of Human Resource Processes

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Abstract:

Employee engagement has received the attention of researchers as well as managers in the last decade. It means the degree of commitment and involvement of employees towards their organization and its value. Employees on a high engagement level are energetic, mentally resilient and dedicated to their work. They enjoy challenges; they face at the workplace. Sometimes, it may be difficult for them to detach themselves from daily work. Engaged employees show excellent performance and contribute towards the goals of the organization. On the contrary, disengaged employees are defensive, and they dissociate themselves from work roles and customers. Some factors like personality characteristics, nature of the job, work environment, perceived organizational support, reward, and recognition, etc. influence employee engagement. Personality characteristics namely big five traits have emerged as the valid predictor of job performance. Extraversion and Conscientiousness are positively related to employee engagement. This paper firstly analyses personality characteristics which are linked to employee engagement. Secondly, it examines the role of human resource processes which can facilitate employee engagement.

Keywords: Employee engagement, human resource processes, gender, personality, contextual factors, organizational performance.

1. Introduction

Employee engagement has received the attention of researchers as well as managers in the last decade. It means the degree of commitment and involvement of employees towards their organization and its value. The term “Engagement” was first conceptualized and defined by Kahn 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, 1990). Harter *et al.*, (2002) further defined employee engagement as “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction as well as enthusiasm for work”. Within the academic domain, engagement is mostly defined as “... a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002).

Engaged employees are energetic, mentally resilient, and they are dedicated to work. They enjoy challenges they face at the workplace. Sometimes it may be difficult for them to detach themselves from daily work. Engaged employees show excellent performance and contribute towards the goal of an organization. On the contrary, disengaged employees are defensive, and they dissociate themselves from work roles and customers. Such employees may show poor performance. Suharti and Suliyanto (2012) suggested that employee engagement has been gaining attention due to its effects on job performance as an organizational outcome. Moreover, according to Kumar and Swetha (2011), highly engaged employees have high job satisfaction, organizational commitment, lower intention to quit and increased organizational citizenship behavior. Research shows that having an engaged and committed workforce can lead to numerous beneficial outcomes, such as lower turnover intentions (Allen *et al.*, 2003) and higher organizational performance (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Harter *et al.*, 2002; Whitman *et al.*, 2010). Gallup (2005) indicates that a high number of engaged employees are helpful for an organization to attract more talented people while disengaged employees are cost to an organization regarding lower productivity, higher absenteeism, recruitment and training cost. Many studies have found the importance of employee engagement for organizational success and showed that a highly engaged workforce is more efficient, delivers high levels of customer satisfaction, attains higher productivity levels and ensures lower turnover rates, which all results in improved overall performance (Buhler, 2006), higher engagement level has statistically correlation with increased corporate performance (ME Moreira & Being Agile, 2013). Charles Woodruffe (2006) emphasized in his study that engaging talented people need to be a top organizational priority because they are precious possessions. Dalal, R. S., Baysinger, M., Brummel, B. J., & LeBreton, J. M. (2012) in their study, found employees engagement as a predictor of employee’s performance.

A global workforce study conducted by Towers Perrin (2008) reveals that, firms that employed highly engaged employees enjoyed a spread of more than 5% in operating margin and 3% in net margin compared to companies that employed highly disengaged workers. Employee engagement continues to be reported at relatively low level in organizations across the globe. For example, Aon Hewitt (2013), found that four out of every ten employees were not engaged, and two out of ten were actively disengaged. It is agreed by most of the researchers that engagement arises from both personal and environmental sources (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Thus, it is important to consider individual and contextual factors for designing HR processes for increasing employee engagement. This paper supports contingency approach for designing human resource processes. This approach emphasizes that no one best way to do things, a large number of external and internal factors must be considered, and the full attention should be on the practice that best fits the given scenario. The approach suggests that an organization's strategy adds to (or detracts from) the impact of human resource processes and performance. The contingency approach develops more situational specific findings. In the following section, a conceptual paradigm has been given for gaining organizational success through increasing employee engagement level while designing HR processes considering individual and contextual differences. The present study argues that universal approach for human resource policies is not appropriate in some conditions. The Universal approach emphasizes on the best practice perspective and implies a direct relationship between particular human resource practices and performance. The universal approach considers the benefits of HRM across all contexts. In best practice, a set of HRM practices is argued to be associated with improved firm performance in all types of organization and by allusion for all types of employees (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

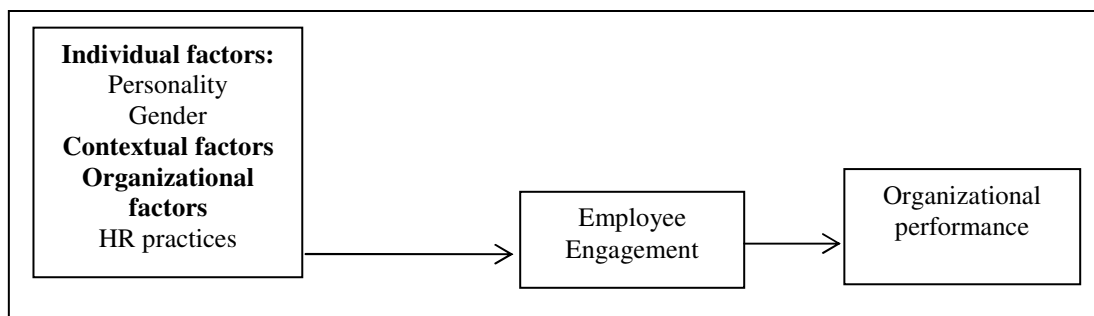


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2. Personality Characteristics and Employee Engagement

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest of researchers in exploring the link between personality and work engagement. Simmons (2010) has also identified personality traits as a suggestive cause of engagement enhancers. Many academicians like Hallberg et al. (2007) attempted to investigate how situational aspects like job resources and job demands and personal aspects of Type A personality interacted with each other and how this interaction affected job engagement.

It has been found that few personality dimensions have an effect on employee engagement due to their behavioural characteristics (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Specifically, high extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness, as well as low neuroticism, relate to high levels of work engagement.

Inceoglu and Warr (2011) argued that low levels of neuroticism and high levels of extraversion predicted employee engagement. Wefald, Reichard, and Serrano (2011) found in their research that, conscientiousness and extraversion, agreeableness predicted engagement and act as a mediator between job satisfaction and commitment. Kahn (1990), Macey and Schneider (2008), and Christian et al. (2011) argued that individual personality traits determine the extent to which employees experience and demonstrate engagement at work. They argued that extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience should be positively related to engagement and neuroticism should be negatively related to engagement. Because individuals on high extraversion show alertness and enthusiasm, anxious employees perceive their work climate as threatening and less safe (Wildermuth, 2010). Engaged employees are more innovative and open to change (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Not only 'broad' personality dimensions but also 'narrow' trait personality measures might also determine engagement. For example, Inceoglu and Warr (2011) found that social potency (a facet of extraversion) and achievement orientation (a facet of conscientiousness with sub-facets 'vigorous' and 'achieving') have a significant relationship with engagement. Other traits such as generalized self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007), core self-evaluation (Rich, LePine & Crawford, 2010), and proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993) have also been linked to engagement. Makikangas et al. (2013) suggested that trait neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion can be used to determine engagement in the organization. Akhtar et al. (2014) identified that emotional intelligence, openness to experience, interpersonal sensitivity, ambition, extraversion, adjustment, and conscientiousness as antecedents of engagement. Gender differences also have been found in determining the engagement level of the employees. In the following section, the effect of gender on employee engagement has been discussed.

3. Gender and Employee Engagement

Gender also plays a role in determining the level of employee engagement. Male employees experience enrichment from work to family and they experience no links from family to work while on the other side female employees experience conflict from work to family and experience enrichment from family to work (Rothbard, 1999). There are different opinions regarding who (male or female)

is more engaged with the organization. Gallup's US research found that women tend to find more fulfillments in their jobs and as a result of which they are more engaged than men (Johnson, 2004). Kapoor and Anthony (2013) suggested that male employees of manufacturing firms are relatively highly engaged as compared to the female employees of the same sector. They found that gender differences are significant for three constructs i.e. job security, career development and work-life balance and workplace wellbeing. And found that women are significantly less engaged regarding these three variables. It highlights the problem faced by women at their work places in different forms like the glass ceiling, stereotyping (related with career development), physical and mental abuses, and inadequate feminine working environment (related to workplace wellbeing). Women employees were also finding difficulty in managing both homes and work (Garg, 2014). Clifford MottazI (1986) in his study found similarities and differences between male and female employees regarding their perceptions and attitudes about work.

According to the Catalyst report 2014, 40% women are executives but at the top level, only 3% are on the board of directors. Why this gap exists? Because women were facing so much different problems other than men. They have different needs to be satisfied. Women face more work-life balance problems. In low gender egalitarian country like India, women have low status. The primary responsibility of taking care home and family lies with women. At work place, the supervisor also thinks and behave in a gendered way. All these have an impact on the engagement level of women. Reena A Shah (2015) found in her study in India that female professionals are generally challenged to cope with multi-role expectation with little support from family members and even lesser consideration from superiors at the workplaces. She suggests that the organizations accept gender differences and devise plans to accommodate individual needs of employees and work toward creating an inclusive corporate ecosystem. In a survey examining gender differences in Indian workplaces, Basu (2008) found that women experienced inequality and exclusion regarding recruitment, remuneration, evaluation, career-progress and welfare provisions, and also a woman get low institutional and organizational support to manage work and family in the Indian context. Institutional support in the form of governmental rules (e.g. Factories Act of 1948; Maternity Benefits Act of 1961 and laws of sexual harassment at work) but these laws have been poorly implemented by organizations (Rajadhyaksha, 2004). Another factor that affects the engagement level of employees is an organizational culture which is discussed in the next section.

4. Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

Organizational culture is expected to influence, and be influenced by, the attitudes and behaviors of organizational members (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Kumar and Swetha (2011) suggested four antecedents of employee engagement: job characteristics, organizational and supervision support, organizational justice and rewards and recognition. Suharti and Suliyanto (2012) found that organizational culture and leadership style have an effect on employee engagement. Shuck, Reio, and Rocco (2011); Naidoo and Martins (2014) found a statistically significant relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement. Gupta et al. (2015) identified factors for employee engagement in financial organizations in India. They found in their study that organizational culture affects employee engagement. The following table summarizes the studies related to antecedent variables for employee engagement:

Factors	Author and Year
Personality: Self-efficacy, Hope, optimism, resilience	Luthans et al., 2007
Core self-evaluation	Rich et al., 2010
Type A	Hallberg et al., 2007
Extraversion	Christian et al., 2011; Inceoglu and Warr, 2011
Agreeableness	Wildermuth, 2010; Wefald et al., 2011
Openness	Macey and Scheider, 2008
Conscientiousness	Wefald et al., 2011
Neuroticism	Inceoglu and Warr, 2011; Wildermuth, 2011
Proactive personality	Bateman and Grant, 1993
Emotional intelligence	Akhtar et al., 2014
Gender	Rothbord, 1999; Johnson, 2004; Kapoor and Anthony, 2013; Garg, 2014
Organizational culture	Suharti and Suliyanto, 2012; Shul et al, 2011; Naidoo and Martins, 2014; Gupta et al., 2015
Organizational justice	Kumar and Swetha, 2011
Organizational support	Kumar and Swetha, 2011

Table 1: Personality, gender, organizational factor and employee engagement studies

5. Observations from Organizations

The first author has done a large number of management development programs and consulting assignments for public as well as private sector organizations. Some observations are given below:

1. In some large organizations, it is observed that some employees are unable to develop identification with the larger purpose of the organization. In any manufacturing organization, 20 to 30% employees belong to officer group and 70 to 80% belong to worker group. Workers have the tendency to compare two factors i.e. the work which they do and the payment they receive from the company. They are unable to understand the larger goal of the organization.

2. It is observed that despite having required knowledge and skill, some workers show poor job performance.
3. In the last two decades, we have seen mushrooming of technical institutes/private universities in each and every state in the country. A large number of students are passing out with BE/B.Tech/Diploma qualifications. However, these students lack relevant skills for the job. In fact, today it is seen that if a job requires diploma holder, a person with BE qualification is working for that job. If a job requires, BE qualification an employee with M.Tech/B.E and MBA is working for that job.
4. Some engineers do not like to work in production and maintenance function as it involves interaction with blue collar workers.
5. Human resource policies are very well designed for officer and executives. However, similar attention should be given to shop floor workers.

5.1. Engaged and Disengaged Employees

Employee engagement means the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards his/her organization and its values. In most situations, employees focus on their job and objectives of their team/department. They may not be able to relate to the larger purpose of organizations. In every organization, few employees show a high level of engagement but some employees do not show such commitment. Examples are given below:

5.2. Engaged Employee in a Sick Company

This is the example of a small steel company in Orissa. The company was located in a remote place. The financial condition of the company was very poor. The company was not able to pay salary on time. Often salary payment was delayed by one or two weeks. It was making steel related products. A shift engineer was paid a salary of Rs, 5000 -- 6000 only. Even in such factory the first author met two three executives who were so much concerned with the organization. They were making their best effort to improve the organization. They showed high commitment for the organization as well as for their job. They were highly dedicated to the organization. They were highly involved in their own work and experienced meaningful and satisfaction. Their age was 40 -- 42 years. Such employees can be highly valuable for any organization. HR policies should be developed in such way so that most of the employees show a high level of engagement.

5.3. Disengaged Employee

In a management development program for a government organization, a middle-level officer asked the following question: - "I am an average employee. I have no chance of any promotion in future. At the same time, as my performance is satisfactory, I will not lose my job. Why should I work?"

Age of this person was around 50 years. According to the authors, such an employee appears mentally disconnected from the organization, and he has no commitment to the organization and his job. He has lost interest in his work. He appears de-motivated. Human resource policies have to be developed to take care of such experiences at the workplace.

Authors have identified some reasons or low engagement level in IT/ITES companies by his experience and observations. These should be considered while making efforts for increasing employee engagement.

5.4. Young Employees in IT/ITES Companies

Now days, many engineering graduates join IT/ITES companies after completing BE/B.Tech. Some of such employees are engaged in software development activities like coding, software testing, quality control, etc.; it is seen that some such employees leave their respective companies after two or three years only. There can be following reasons for leaving the organization:

- They do not enjoy job content like coding, testing, etc.
- Compensation may be inadequate for them.
- They are interested to pursue higher education like MS, MBA in India or USA.
- They may not be comfortable in the company. They are unable to adjust to the organization.
- They are interested to find a different job or better job.

Such factors can increase employee turnover in IT/ITES companies. Therefore, human resource policies should be developed in a manner so that it takes care of the aspirations of young employees. In the industry, today the challenge is to create a workforce of engaged employees. Human resource managers are trying their best to develop such employees. In this context, this paper analyzes the role of human resource processes for developing such employees. It is argued that human resource policies should be redesigned to achieve this objective. Personality characteristics and gender differences should be considered while designing human resource processes. Some examples have been analyzed to identify reasons for low employee engagement. Suggestions have been given for handling such situations.

It is argued that innovative human resource processes should be developed by organizations. As personality influences many work outcomes, it should be assessed in detail during the selection process. Liking and disliking of the job have to be analyzed during selection. After selection, an employee should be given job which he/she can enjoy. If an employee is doing what he dislikes, his engagement level will be low. Performance appraisal has to assess achievement of an employee as well as his difficulties at the workplace. Supportive work environment will enhance engagement. Training and development process has to focus on attitude and behaviour. Compensation and reward process has to be linked to the contribution of an employee. Career growth opportunities should

be available to shop floor workers also. Therefore, innovative human resource processes can help us in creating employee engagement. Engaged employees will drive organizations for transformation and success.

5.5. Human Resources to Process and Employee Engagement

In this globalized world, every organization has the diverse workforce; it has employees with a different personality, various age groups, and experiences, different aspirations and needs. Thus in today's environment, an organization requires having differentiated access to training and career development opportunities for its employees, different work/life balance practices according to the need of employees and empowerment to increase the employee engagement. Employee engagement is a wider domain that relates nearly all branches of human resource management facets. If every aspect of human resource were not addressed well with an appropriate approach, employees would find themselves, poorly engaged at their work place that might lead to adverse organizational outcomes (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Raveesh *et al.* (2010) argued that employee engagement is a critical organizational issue, and the greatest asset of any organization is its people. Organizations are now focusing on human resource strategically for enhancing the level of employee engagement and commitment. To gain benefits, engagements should be explicitly embedded within an integrated system of human resource policies, practices and procedures (Guest, 2014).

Truss *et al.* (2013) suggested that employee engagement may be beneficial for understanding, how effective human resource processes can result in higher individual and organizational performance. There have been few types of research examining how human resource practices affect individual and organizational outcomes through employee engagement (Alfes, Shantz, *et al.*, 2013; Alfes, Truss, *et al.*, 2013; Sparrow, 2014; Truss *et al.*, 2013). Alfes *et al.* (2013) showed a positive relation between perceived human resource practices and employee engagement in two independent samples. According to Joshi and Sodhi (2011), six management functions emerged as critical predictors of engagement: job content, compensation/monetary benefits, work-life balance, top-management employee relations, the scope for advancement and career growth and team orientation/teamwork. To enhance employee engagement, an organization should invest in its human resource practices and determine the engagement level. Organization should identify important factors that lead to employee engagement and incorporate them in human resource practices for enhancing employee engagement. Some organizations have already started to invest considerably in practices and policies to enhance engagement in the work place (Robert, 2006). Thus, we argue that it is important and necessary to improve employee engagement through human resource practices to achieve a high level of organizational performance. (Randstad survey, 2012) also found main activities those related to organizational performance.

- Providing a comfortable and stimulating work environment
- Offering promotions or bonuses to high performing employees
- Encouraging employees to share their ideas and opinions
- Investing in employees' careers through training, professional development or continuing education
- Having a formal system in place to recognize/reward top employees
- Providing regular performance reviews
- Hosting social or team-building events
- The most highly rated activities for enhancing engagement are not the most widely offered by employers. (Source: Randstad engagement index, 2012)

In the next section, main human resource practices that are considered to be important for enhancing employee engagement have been discussed.

5.6. Training and Development

Sometimes due to lack of required skills employee feel detached from their work. So proper training should be provided. Research shows that employee work engagement can be increased through training (Luthans, Avey, Avolio & Peterson, 2010). Training helps in improving service and thereby impacts service performance and employee engagement (Paradise, 2008).

5.7. Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal should be done for all employees in the organization. Fairness in the process should be taken care of. Employees should feel that their efforts will be recognized and rewarded. Mone and London (2010) suggested five performance management activities that influence engagement: (1) setting performance and development goals; (2) providing ongoing feedback and recognition; (3) managing employee development; (4) conducting appraisals; and (5) creating a climate of trust and empowerment.

5.8. Career Planning

Career plan should be designed for every employee. In this way, they will be clear about their career path. Pandey and David (2013) posited three antecedents to engagement: satisfactory work environment, job enrichment and career growth opportunities. Dharmendra and Naveen (2013) found antecedents of employee engagement: relationships among co-workers and team members, employees' pride in their organization, clear career growth opportunities, nature of the job, managers' trust and integrity and the clear contribution of employee performance to the organization's performance. Systematic career growth policies will help a lot in improving employee engagement.

5.9. Recruitment and Selection

At the time of recruitment and selection, it should be ensured that right candidate is placed at the right position. (Schneider et al., 2009) Found that the recruitment policy of an organization has a direct impact on future employees' engagement and commitment. To attract and retain high potential, high aspiration, productive, committed and 'engaged' employees, organizations need to provide working environment with a good 'fit' between the expectations of future employees and working environment (Herriot, 2002; Morgeson & Dierdorff, 2011). Human resource managers should be able to select applicants those who are most likely to be engaged on the job (Guest, 2014). Selection processes such as personality assessments, structured interviews, assessment center exercises and reference checks should be adopted. Vance (2006) argued that organizations can increase employee engagement "by selecting the candidates who are best suited to the job *and* the organization's culture."

6. Compensation Management

Pay structure should be based on job evaluation and equal pay for the same job. Compensation or remuneration which involves both financial and non-financial rewards the most important attribute to employee engagement that motivates an employee to perform well and hence giving attention more on career and personal development. Attractive compensation package should be offered which comprises a combination of pay, bonuses, other financial rewards as well as non-financial rewards like an extra holiday and voucher schemes. A study by Saks and Rotman (2006) investigated and found that recognition and rewards are important predictors of employee engagement. Kahn (1990) observed that engagement level of employees is the result of their perceptions of the receiving benefits. The table below shows the researches which linked human resource processes and engagement.

Human resource management practice	Author and Year
Training and development	Luthans et al., 2010
Performance management	Mone and London, 2010
Career development	Pandey and David, 2013; Dharmendra and Naveen, 2013
Recruitment and selection	Schneider et al., 2009; Harriot, 2002; Morgeson and Dierdorff, 2011; Guest, 2014; Vance, 2006
Compensation management	Saks and Rotman, 2006; Kahn, 1990, Joshi and Sodhi, 2011
Job design	Joshi and Sodhi, 2011, Hallberg et al., 2007

Table 2: Human resource management practices and employee engagement studies

7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that individual and contextual differences should be taken care of while designing HR practices. This helps in enhancing the level of employee engagement. Highly engaged employees resulted in the higher productivity and performance for the organization. The paper emphasizes that HR practices should be gender and context sensitive. It can be noted that universal approach is not appropriate in certain conditions, and contextual approach may give a better result. The conceptual framework presented in the study can be empirically tested for the further validity of the findings.

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