Employee Engagement:
Key Implications For Human Resource Management Practices

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Abstract

Employee Engagement (EE) has been the deciding factor of organizational success in the recent years. The conflict for talent today is one of the prime challenges faced by organisations, both large and small, and it has become increasingly harder to attract and retain the right talent that is necessary to sustain a stable workforce. To keep today's dynamic workforce engaged, is the overarching need for the practitioners and academicians alike. The prominence of engaged employees is depicted in the strong bottom line outcomes, productivity, retention, low attrition. Engagement has gained huge momentum in the past 2.5 decades. Hence to leverage engagement in the minds of employees, various enablers/drivers have been identified based on the industry needs and generational differences. Extant literature identifies rational drivers like pay and rewards, personal development and career development) and emotional drivers(feeling valued and involved, involvement in decision making...) to drive engagement in the work place.This paper consolidates the research activities of EE and the Human Resource Management (HRM) practices that enable engagement further in the minds of the employees. Mainly HRM practices are targeted because, any organization has to have robust HRM practices to address the needs of the workforce.HRM practices is an umbrella term which can address the individual differences of the employees. In addition, though engagement has been in the news for the past 2.5 decades for engagement to deliver its purported benefits engagement needs to be explicitly embedded within an integrated system of HRM policies, practices and procedures This paper brings about an integrative review of employee engagement and HRM practices to harness engagement in the minds of employees which will result in organizational effectiveness and accentuates EE as a tool for competitive advantage.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Engagement, Human Resource Management Practices, Training and Development Well Being.

Introduction

In this unstable, uncertain environment, perhaps more than at any other time in recent history, engaging employees has become a strategic imperative; one that will become a key source of competitive advantage for organizations who develop a passionately committed employee base, not because they are paid to be committed, but because they choose to be committed(Shuck,Rocco and Albornoz ,2011).The quality of an organization's human resources is perhaps the leading indicator of its growth and sustainability. The attainment of a workplace with high-caliber employees starts with the selection of the right people for the right jobs (Harter,Schmidt, Killham,Asplund, 2006) Employee engagement has been defined as "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (Shuck and Wollard, 2010). Engaged employees have consistently been shown to be more productive on most available organizational measures (Richman, 2006;

Fleming and Asplund, 2007; Wagner and Harter, 2006).Having engaged employees is the need of the hour because humans become drawn into their work, physically and emotionally, in ways that display how they experience work (Shuck,Rocco and Albarnos,2011). Everyday, workers choose to "express and employ their [authentic] selves [. . .] or withdraw and defend their [authentic] selves" at work(Kahn,1990;1992).

ENGAGEMENT AND ITS CONCEPTUALIZATION

Kahn(1990,1992) is considered to be the pioneer of the term engagement. In his seminal grounded theory he defined personal engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances". Disengagement was posited to be the withdrawal of oneself and of one's preferred behaviors, promoting a lack of overall connectedness, emotional absence and passive behavior.

Kahn(1990,1992) identified meaningfulness, safety and availability as the three important conditions for having an employee engagement. Shuck et al (2011) in their study propound that Kahn(1990,1992) work's were influenced by motivational psychologists and sociologists of his time. Motivational psychologist Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs provides a straightforward conceptual framework for understanding the importance of fulfilling basic human needs(Shuck et al.,2011).Kahn(1990) has equated the final step -self-actualization to the state where an employee is fully engaged. Self-actualization is defined as the completion of activity that intensely satisfies (Maslow, 1970). Finally, the drive to self-actualization parallels the concept of employee engagement (Kahn, 1990) by conceptualizing the drive to ultimate self fulfillment, a deep need for internal, emotional satisfaction that all humans long for; employees long "to become everything one is capable of becoming" (Maslow,1998). For employees who reach this level, work becomes a critical part of their identity (Kahn,1990).

Herzberg's two-factor theory proposed that autonomy in being, recognition of self and work, and meaningful understandings were factors that increased an employee's intrinsic willingness to engage in work. Herzberg (1968) proposed that intrinsic factors (i.e. the importance of contribution, personal growth), rather than extrinsic factors (i.e. compensation, company image) motivated employees to be engaged in their work, closely paralleling Kahn's (1990) domain of meaningfulness. Further, satisfaction of individual needs was identified as an important component to engaging (Kahn, 1990) employees (Shuck et al.2011).

Though there are different conceptualisations, studies like Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006);Robinson et al.,(2004) have proposed an attitude-engagement model which posit that positive employee attitudes are associated with positive behavior; that focuses on overall job attitudes such as job satisfaction and commitment with overall individual effectiveness. To sum up the various conceptualizations of engagement, Initially engagement has been posited as a behavioural model by Kahn(1990;1992) and Schaufeli developed an UWES attitudinal construct based on job demands model(Guest,2014). Studies like Kahn(1990), Saks (2006), Rich, Le Pine and Crawford(2010), Macey and Schneider (2008) have focused on engagement at the individual level. Indicative publications (Harter et al.,2003;Saks,2006,) have suggested that engaged employees are more productive. Rich et al.,(2010) have provided evidence of the utility of engagement beyond traditional predictors of workplace performance, such as job attitudes.

Hence keeping the above diverse conceptualisations, models and frameworks in mind, this paper propound that engagement is an inclusive topic that takes the physical,

emotional and cognitive components that has an impact on the self and further leads to organizational effectiveness. (Kahn 1990,1992;May et al.,2004;Robinson,2004; Saks; 2006).Though engagement has been in the news for the past 2.5 decades for engagement to deliver its purported benefits engagement needs to be explicitly embedded within an integrated system of HRM policies, practices and procedures (Guest, 2014).Some of the prominent HRM scholars(Guest,1997) in their frameworks have cited selection, performance development, and training and development, as key HRM practices

Employee Engagement And Human Resource Management Practices

Shuck et al., (2011) has pointed out that employees are uniquely different. Engagement, however, is not for a select few that have the right combination of personality characteristics and who are fortunate to work for organizations that strive to develop engaging cultures. Although levers that drive engagement may vary from organization and employee, engagement is theoretically possible at every organization and with every employee. Czarnowsky(2008) has observed a deep discrepancy between perceived importance of engagement and the level of engagement that exists in organizations today. This discrepancy, however, presents a significant opportunity for human resource development (HRD) scholars and practitioners to develop research agendas and practical strategies toward the forefront of this emerging concept (Shuck et al.,2011). Work is an engaging experience when job roles are interesting, challenging and meaningful (Kahn, 1990), and provide autonomous decision-making abilities in how work gets accomplished, not just what work gets done (Shuck and Wollard, 2010).Understanding the monumental nature of employee engagement , organizations are turning towards HRD practitioners for crafting robust strategies to lever engagement in the minds of employees.

Shuck et al.,(2011) to study the experience of an engaged employee for HRD implications have identified two themes namely recruitment and management practices to understand the employee perspective of being engaged.

Recruitment Practices: Recruitment practices focused on how the company selected its employees through rigorous interview processes used to gauge the degree potential employees matched desired job and personality related variables. This matching process was believed to provide a level of good job fit between the applicant and the company (Shuck et al.,2011).

Management Practices: Management practices focused on specific behaviors reinforced as a part of the company's culture as well as learning and development programs (Saks,2006:Robinson et al.,2004) used to promote productive, open work environments. Specific, identified

behaviors included developing open lines of communication between managers and employees, encouraging managers to provide clear expectations and involving employees in decision-making(Robinson et al.,2004;Anita,2013)) processes when appropriate (Shuck et al.,2011).

Several studies(Harter et al.,2003; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006;Anita2013) suggested that an employee's direct manager(plays an important role in the development of engagement encouraging cultures; many managerial behaviors have the potential to provide a sense of meaningful work(Kahn 1990;1992), a safe area for employee's to work and communicate(Saks,2006) as well as the necessary resources to complete work (Hackman and Oldman, 1976; Kahn, 1990; Maslow, 1970). Conversely, poor management practices such as creating an unfriendly or hostile workplace climate or having poor communication skills have been shown to result in decreased satisfaction and increased levels of turnover (Harter et al., 2003). Turnover or terminating employment is operationalized as the ultimate act of disengagement(Shuck et al.,2011).

Shuck et al.,(2011) in their study articulated most employees found themselves engaged when fully supported by their managers, when their opinions were heards ,they were felt valued and not treated like just another 'member', but treated as a person whose thoughts and opinions were fairly treated and appreciated.T his again reinforces the fact the role a co-worker,manager and team plays in crafting the experience of an engaged employee. Environments that encourage and sustain relational elements are built on concepts such as cooperation, support, trust, and partnerships (Kahn, 1990,1992).

Employee Engagement And Psychological Climate

Another most important facet for developing engaged employees is the psychological climate(Shuck et al.2011). Psychological climate is defined as the perception and interpretation of one's organizational environment in relation to an employee's well-being and has been operationalized as including flexible and supportive management, role clarity, freedom of self-expression, a sense of contribution toward organizational goals, adequate recognition and challenging work (Brown and Leigh, 1996,Shuck et al.,2011). Employees who work in positive psychological climates are more productive and fulfill desired organizational objectives (Brown and Leigh, 1996; Kahn, 1990; O'Neill and Arendt, 2008). While the feeling of family at work (Rath, 2006) and a positive psychological climate emerged as important to fostering engagement at work, such workplaces are hard to find and even harder to foster.So, ultimately organizations that look to foster and develop engagement must address some of the basic needs that is to nurture and develop a positive psychological

climate where the employees feel like at home and find themselves free to exhibit their whole in-role performances freely in the three dimensions namely physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions. This will further address the three main drivers that will bring about engagement namely meaningfulness, safety and availability(Kahn 1990,1992). Studies show that managers who encourage cut throat competition that encouraged team members to "compete instead of collaborate" environments like this discouraged relationship development (Rath, 2006) often reducing productivity, safety and innovation (Harter et al., 2003) in the long term.This paper focuses on selection, performance management, training and development, rewards and recognition. The focus is on these four practices because they are core HR functions that organization's need to attend to irrespective of their particular HR strategic focus(Albrecht,bakker,Gruman,Macey and Saks ,2015).

Employee Engagement And Selection

To attract and retain high caliber, high achieving, productive, committed and "engaged"

employees, organizations need to provide working contexts that provide a good "fit" between the role expectations of prospective employees and their subsequent working environment (Herriot, 2002). If organizations want employees who are energetic, dedicated, and focused on achieving organizational goals (Macey and Schneider, 2008) then HR professionals should be able to apply evidence-based selection processes to predict from among a group of applicants those who are most likely to be engaged on the job (Guest, 2014). In the selection arena, personality plays a huge role in enhancing engagement(Macey and Schneider,2008:Guest,2014). Inceoglu and Warr (2011) interestingly addresses that thoughtit is widely agreed that engagement arises from both personal and environmental sources, "theoretical discussions and empirical investigations have so far emphasized one of those, mainly examining engagement as a response to characteristics of the job" .Albrech et al.,(2015) in their study propound that rather than reviewing how a broad range of different selection methods can be used to select for engagement, we focus here on identifying the key personality predictors of engagement. Personality measures are "increasingly being used by managers and human resource professionals to evaluate the suitability of job applicants for positions across many levels in an organization"(Rothstein and Goffin, 2006). While selection processes might, , include a combination of personality assessments, structured interviews, assessment centre exercises and reference checks(Albrecht et al.,2015). It might also be important to bring in both broad and narrow personality dimensions in selection processes. For example,the broad traits of Conscientiousness (particularly the achievement dimension), Emotional Stability, and Extraversion will

provide utility for selecting energetic and motivated employees who are focused on achieving organizational goals. Finer grain personality traits such as Achievement Striving, Activity Seeking, Optimism, and Self-Discipline are also likely to predict engagement.

Employee Engagement And Performance Management

Performance management is an ongoing organizational process involving a wide range of activities that include identifying, assessing, and promoting individual and team performance for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives (Aguinis and Pierce, 2008).Studies(Albrecht etal.,2015;Mone et al.,2011) have articulated how performance management processes can affect engagement. Performance management processes can indirectly influence engagement and outcomes through their influence on organizational climate, perceptions of job demands and resources, and of the associated feelings of meaningfulness, safety and availability that employees experience. Mone and London (2010) identified 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. Gruman and Saks (2011) argued that although superior performance is the ultimate objective of performance management, superior performance is best considered a distal outcome of the performance management process. Gruman and Saks (2011) proposed an engagement management model designed to generate high levels of engagement as a precursor to high levels of performance. The three primary elements are (1) performance agreement (2) engagement facilitation and (3) performance and engagement appraisal and feedback.

Hence, a properly designed and managed performance management processes will have a positive and direct influence on employee engagement and downstream attitudinal, behavioural, and organizational outcomes (Albrecht et al.,2015).

Employee Engagement -reward And Recognition

The need to focus on developing, nurturing and retaining human capital has gained prominence in recent years. Organizations, in order to fulfil this need are turning towards creative, unconventional and intrinsic approaches to formulate their rewards and recognition practices. Organizations look to a variety of methods that ensure employee engagement, productivity and loyalty. Innovative, viable and sustainable rewards and recognition programmes are now 'must-have' tools for an organization and its managers to motivate employees (Limaye, Jalali, Martyn, 2013) Rewarding practices fulfil an employee's need to be fairly rewarded for their capabilities, efforts and

contribution. Reward systems indicate what the organisation values and shapes individuals' behaviour Edvardsson (2008) . Organizations implement rewarding practices with an aim to offer competitive salaries, bonus packages, and to share the benefits of peoples' combined efforts in a fair manner. Incentive plans, profit sharing schemes and other opportunities for wealth and ownership sharing are the various forms of rewards organizations set out to present their employees with. Recognition practices are those that appreciate employees' efforts, contribution and results, thus positively recognizing and reinforcing desirable actions and behaviours. Such practices also help to create and maintain a 'Climate of Appreciation' in an organization with sincere appreciation of good work and extra effort, regularly and in a wide variety of ways(Limaye et al.,2013). Such practices are of more intrinsic value to employees as most often, they are carried out with no attached monetary value.Albrecht et al.,(2015) articulate that when employees experience a coherent system of engagement related policies, practices, and procedures, all aimed at optimizing individual, group and organizational effectiveness, the likelihood of focused effort towards the achievement of organizational goals is heightened(Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Employee Engagement And Training And Development Practices

HRM practices are one way for an employer to signal their willingness to invest in and support their employees (Alfes, Kerstin, Shantz, Amanda, Truss, Catherine and Soane, Emma 2013).Organizations could also develop learning and development programs that are available to every level of the organization that focus on strength development (Wagner and Harter, 2006), career development, self-awareness and alignment with the organization's vision, mission and values. These programs, however, require marketing strategies, strong planning and preparation and should be grounded in the culture of the organization. Employees know the difference between programs that are launched to fill a numbers gap in a HR climate survey and those that are authentically designed to nurture the development of employee's growth in the organization (Shuck et al.,2011).Much literature of engagement has emerged from the burnout, Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory which state that work engagement is most likely to develop when employees are confronted with challenging job demands in combination with high job resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014). Importantly, the JD-R model also includes a feedback loop, representing a positive gain cycle, which describes how employees who are engaged in their work are more able to create their own resources, which then, over time, foster further engagement(Albrech et al.,2015).They further propound the JD-R model to show how HR professionals can improve

employee engagement through training, learning, and development. They have identified three interventions to facilitate employee work engagement, namely: (1) providing the optimal mix of job demands and resources,(2) optimizing personal resources through training and (3) encouraging employees to engage in job crafting. For optimizing job demands and resources, tailor-made interventions can then be designed, aimed at reducing salient hindrance demands, and increasing important job resources, which, in turn, may increase work engagement and job performance. These interventions may, for example, include transformational leadership training and survey feedback workshops through which unique and specific best practices that competitive advantage may be realized. Personal resources can be optimized through training because the more employees believe they are able to meet their job demands and that they will experience good outcomes, the higher their levels of work engagement. Through learning and development initiatives and through self-initiated action, employees can learn to develop their job resources, manage their demands and develop their personal resources. The bottom line is that HRM professionals, through learning and development initiatives, can help create and sustain engagement in the organizational contexts within which they work (Albrecht et al.,2015).HRM professionals provide the systems and processes through which organizations, teams and individual employees are able to identify and satisfy learning and development needs. For example, customer facing employees, through customer service training, can develop the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and personal resources they need to optimally satisfy customer needs and to achieve higher sales(Albrecht et al.,2015).The freedom to engage concerns the safety of the environment and the decision an employee makes about their safety when taking certain actions (e.g. the decision to engage; Kahn, 1990).The core business of the HR function is to develop the employees in accordance with the business strategy, select and hire people, train and develop the staff, evaluate their performance, reward them and create a culture of learning (Evans, 2003). Some of the major HRM functions are recruitment and selection, education and development, performance management. Employees need to feel competent, valued and purposeful in their work and organizations contribute to competence and autonomy development by informing employees of what is expected, providing resources to complete work and following-up with focused and balanced feedback (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999; Harter et al., 2003; Kahn, 1990; Wagner and Harter, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems clear that no one step or process works to create engaged employees across any organization,

unit or team. It is a challenging and robust task; however, a worthy organizational goal tied to increasing productivity and organizational effectiveness (Shuck and Wollard, 2010). In this unstable, uncertain environment, perhaps more than at any other time in recent history, engaging employees has become a strategic imperative; one that will become a key source of competitive advantage for organizations who develop a passionately committed employee base, not because they are paid to be committed, but because they choose to be committed(Shuck et al.,2011).Organizations look to have engaged employees and tend to craft engagement strategies ,thought it is an individual's rational decision to engage and disengage in the job that he is performing. So, engagement again is a two-way street(Robinson et al.,2004). On one hand, the organization want to keep their employees engaged,hence have to create the situations where they can keep the employees engaged. Employees feel valued and engaged when the organization invests in them and shows interest in their personal and career development.A concrete HRM syatems can create competitive advantage(Albrecht et al., 2015) In addition, employees decide whether they have to be engaged or disengaged in the job. Understanding, this organizations seek the expertise of HRD professionals to have robust strategies to have engaged employees. As for other organizations seeking the development of an engaged workforce, HRD scholars, researchers and practitioners will be at the forefront of both the practical and scholarly knowledge emerging around this topic of study. Organizations and HRD professionals can work together as a first step in a new and engaging direction(Shuck et al. 2011).

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