

A LITERATURE REVIEW ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

R.J. Khaire

Mahatma Gandhi Vidyamandir's Institute of Management and Research, Nashik
dr.rupalikhaire@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Employee engagement strategies are one of the key research areas in the human resource domain of management. Engaged employees are found to be more productive, efficient, and effective. Engaged employees are more likely to be higher performing and productive. They also often show a greater commitment to a company's goals and values. On the other hand disengaged employees can be a liability for the organization. Organizations employ various strategies to keep their employees engaged. This article reviews select literature on employee engagement strategies. Selection of papers was done through Google Scholar. Articles with high number of citations were selected for the review. A gist of observations is presented at the end of this paper that summarizes the review.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Employee engagement strategy, Literature review

Introduction

Employee engagement is a human resources (HR) concept that reflects the level of enthusiasm and dedication an employee feels toward their job. Employees who are engaged care about their work and also about the performance of the company and believe that their efforts make a difference. An engaged employee is in it for more than the salary and considers their well-being linked to their performance, thereby instrumental to their organization's success. Employee engagement can be crucial to a company's success, directly linked to employee morale and job satisfaction. A critical part of creating and maintaining employee engagement is communication. Engaged employees are more likely to be higher performing and productive. They also often show a greater commitment to a company's goals and values. Employers can promote employee engagement in different ways, including communicating expectations, keeping employees informed about the company's performance, offering promotions and rewards for excellent work, and providing regular feedback. Other employee engagement strategies include making employees feel respected and valued and making them feel that their ideas are being understood and heard. Engaged employees think that their work is meaningful. They also believe that they are backed and appreciated by their supervisors and responsible for the success of their company.

Methodology

In this paper, a review has been carried of select literature on employee engagement strategies. Items were searched through Google Scholar and were selected for review based on higher citations. The review aims to find out the patterns and trends of research in the strategic area of HR. The criteria for selection was kept at a level of minimum 100 citations for the paper.

Literature Review

Markos and Sridevi (2010) have stated that employee engagement is a strong predictor of positive organizational performance and clearly shows the two-way relationship between employer and employee compared to the three earlier constructs: employee commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior. Employees who are engaged are emotionally attached to their organization and are highly involved in their job with a great deal of enthusiasm for the success of their employer, often going that extra mile beyond the contractual employment agreement. Osborne and Hammoud (2016) write that US corporations lose around \$350 billion annually due to disengaged employees. Recognition and rewards, employee empowerment, and building a bond between employees and leaders are employee engagement strategies that organizations should follow. Kumar and Pansari (2015) think that the attitude of the employees toward the organization has a

significant impact on how they treat customers and how they approach their jobs. But recent research also points out that high levels of employee engagement are related to higher rates of profitability growth. Sundaray (2011) writes that attention to engagement strategies will increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness in higher profits, productivity, customer satisfaction, quality, employee retention, and increased adaptability. Shuck and Wollard (2009) believe that employee engagement has earned considerable popularity in the past 20 years yet it is inconsistently defined and not well conceptualized. Even though much has been written on the subject, very little rigorous academic research has been done. This research gap has resulted in a disjointed approach to understanding and developing strategies for employee engagement within organizations. Shuck and Reio (2011) have pointed out that employee engagement strategies are widely used in practice. However, the construct remains underdeveloped in the human resource management (HRM) literature. This underdevelopment in the HRM scholarly community, combined with high-interest levels in the HRM practitioner community, indicates the need to close the research gap, in theory, scholarship, and practice. Matthews (2016), in a paper, has highlighted the limitations of approaches in a large number of organizations and propose a series of strategic choices that organizations should make to help ensure their future approach is more efficient and effective. Truss et al. (2013) have written that interest has been shown late in the parallel stream of research on the linkage between employee engagement and performance, bringing the two together to show that engagement may constitute the mechanism through which HRM practices influence organizational and individual performance. Trahan (2009) has stated that for the White House administration to succeed in the discharge of its roles and responsibilities, the employees should be engaged enough in their work to support the new administration. Taneja et al. (2015) write that employee engagement should be viewed as a long-term commitment between the organization and the employees, each complementing the other in an era of

increasing international operations. Employee engagement is a major strategy for long-term organizational sustainability in global markets. In their study, Bhattacharya and Mukherjee (2009) find that although fair reward practices are prevalent in the three IT organizations, however, there is a difference in perception in the different categories of rewards amongst the three groups of employees from the same industrial sector. Differences are also seen in the employees' attitudes from the different organizations in the same industrial sector, "Information Technology," in judging the role of rewards in employee engagement. Abhram (2012) states that satisfied employees may just be working to meet the demands of their jobs somehow. Such efforts do not result in higher productivity. On the other hand, research has shown that engaged employees ensure higher productivity in organizations. Hence, the trend is seen towards designing programs that will help to enhance the level of employee engagement through satisfied employees. An employee is engaged when he shows a positive attitude towards the organization and expresses a commitment to remain with the organization. Arrowsmith and Parker (2013) have written that employee engagement has become a dominant part of the literature on human resource management (HRM). However, there has been relatively less investigation of this implication for human resource management in organizations. Kumar and Gopinath (2016) have studied employee retention and engagement strategies in the Indian BPO companies and found that the attrition rates in BPO industries are very high, reflecting upon ineffective employee engagement strategies. Bhuvanaiah (2014) writes that while employee engagement is a well-researched concept, it lacks a definite conceptual understanding and a generally accepted definition. Despite its predictive role in attaining success for an organization, there is a requirement for exploring the core content of the concept.

Data analysis

At least three authors (Shuck and Wollard 2009; Shuck and Reio 2011, and Bhuvanaiah 2014) have pointed out that the research in employee engagement needs to be

stepped up to gain more clarity on the concept. They find that at present, there is some vagueness and ambiguity around the concept of employee engagement. The core content of the concept still stays unexplored and unclear. A generally accepted definition of the concept is wanted to establish sound theoretical foundations. Literature is seen establishing and confirming the impact of employee engagement on organizational performance (Sundaray 2011, Bhuvanaiah 2014). It is worth noting that many precedents have been established with employee engagement - profits, productivity, customer satisfaction, quality, employee retention, and increased adaptability.

Moreover, researchers have conducted sector-specific studies (Bhattacharya and Mukherjee 2009 – IT; Kumar and Gopinath 2016 – BPO companies). A distinction between satisfied employees and engaged employees has been made by authors like Abhram (2012), who believe that merely satisfied employees do not contribute much to the organization's productivity. On the other hand, employees must be engaged to strive for that extra yard of contribution leading to excellent results.

Conclusion

Some authors have claimed that employee engagement has been inconsistently defined and not well conceptualized. More scholarly research is warranted in this area as employee engagement strategy is widely seen in practice. As more research on the concept happens, clarity will emerge on its nature. Given its importance, its antecedents and precedents should be studied with more rigor and interest. There is a very close association between employee engagement and employee and organizational performance. Employee engagement has important implications on factors like employee interaction with the customers. The concept has a strategic relevance as it is linked with the long-term performance of the organization. It is a major strategy for long-term organizational sustainability in international markets. Employee empowerment, recognition and rewards, and building a bond between employees and leaders are important employee engagement strategies that organizations should follow.

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