Employee Engagement and Work Culture

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to explore strategies that some communication business leaders use to engage their employees. The target population consisted of four communication business leaders in Jackson, Mississippi, who possessed at least 1 year of successful employee engagement experience. The self-determination theory served as the study's conceptual framework. Semi structured interviews were conducted, and the participating company's archived documents were gathered. Patterns were identified through a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, and theme development and revision. Interpretations from the data were subjected to member-checking to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. Based on the methodological triangulation of the data collected, prominent themes emerged from thematically analysing the data: rewards and recognition, empowering employees, and building a bond between leaders and employees.
Keywords: Employee Engagement, Leadership, Work Culture

Introduction

Employee Engagement was conceptualized by Kahn, (1990) as he explained how people can "use varying degrees of their selves physically, cognitively and emotionally in work role performances". Therefore Employee engagement is the level of work commitment and involvement an employee has towards the values of the organization. An engaged employee is well aware of business scenario, and works with team members to enhance and improve the performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. Every sector should work towards the cultivating and nurturing of engagement culture. And this can be achieved by a two-way relationship between employee and employer. Therefore, Employee Engagement acts as an indicator which determines the association of an individual with the organization HR practitioners are of the opinion that the engagement challenge has a lot to do with how employee feels about their work experience and how they are treated in the organization. It has a lot to do with the emotions of an employee who fundamentally connected to the success in a company. There are people who never give their best efforts no matter how hard HR and line managers try to engage them. But for most employees they want to stay committed 2 to their companies because doing so satisfies a powerful and a basic need in connection to something significant. The survival of corporate industries is dependent on maximizing profits from existing capabilities, while recognizing and adjusting to the fact that what may work today may not necessarily work in the future (Kortmann, Gelhard, Zimmermann, & Piller, 2014). To make or maintain their companies' profitability, leaders of companies must

work hard to engage employees (Kortmann et al., 2014). However, leaders may sometimes struggle to adapt their organization in response to change if they limit their focus to existing products and processes (Hill & Birkinshaw, 2012). Understanding how to manage the balance between employee relations, adopting innovation, and maximizing short-term profits is critical to business leaders ensuring a viable future for their corporations (Hill & Birkinshaw, 2012). The use of advanced technologies, skilled labour, best practices, and education has helped to increase the efficiencies in many major organizations and firms. However, disengaged employees who have lowered productivity since the 2008 financial meltdown have affected the financial performances of many U.S. organizations (Purcell, 2014). The longevity of an organization is affected by employee engagement, which is a factor on the financial performance of the organization (Bersin, 2014). In contrast, improved employee productivity had a positive effect on organizational financial performance.

Literature Review

Key drivers of employee engagement

In 2006, on the basis of twelve major studies, The Conference Board published a paper titled 'Employee Engagement –A review of current research and its implication' which was conducted by research firm such as Gallup, Towers Perrin, Blessing White, The Corporate Leadership Council and other It came out that 4 of the studies mentioned 8 key drivers of employee engagement out of a total of 26 key drivers collectively. These are:

a) Trust & integrity

b) Nature of the job

c) Line of sight between employee performance and company performance

d) Career growth opportunities

e) Pride about the company

f) Co-workers / team members

g) Employee development

h) Relationship with manager

There are few more drivers which contribute in increasing employee engagement such as:

a) A culture of respect where good job is appreciated.

b) Feedback, counselling and mentoring

c) Fair reward, recognition and incentive scheme

d) Effective leadership

e) Clear job expectations

f) Adequate tools to perform work responsibilities

g) Motivation

The Three Types of Employees

1, Engaged employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

2, NOT- Engaged employees are essentially 'checked out'. They are sleepwalking through their workday, putting time – but not energy or passion – into their work.

3, Actively Disengaged employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

New expectations

In recent years a paradigm shift has been noticed in the employee- employer relationship. Due to increase in competiveness, globalization and volatile business environment, organizations are encountering a challenge to get the best talent and to retain it in pursuit for success in the business. Now the psychological contract differ to what it was in the past; no single job is considered as a lifelong job for present employees now, And this is an evidence that the expectations of both employee and employer are changing. Some employees now seek short- term careers in different organizations with the expectation that they will commit for the short- term and move on from jobs that are not satisfying, or simply use experience gained in one role as a stepping stone to another job (Bates, 2004). In increasingly turbulent times engagement may therefore be the 'deal- breaker' for organizations seeking sustainable success. Delloit University Press conducted a research titled "Becoming irresistible: A new model for employee engagement" by Josh Bersin (2015) suggests some employees now seek improving work culture rather than focusing on individualistic approach to employee engagement. He suggested 5 major elements, strategies and approaches that work together to enhance today's workforce

- Make work meaningful
- Foster great management
- Establish flexible humane inclusive workplace
- Create ample opportunities for the growth
- Transparency in vision

Self-Determination Theory

The theory of work engagement, SDT, was formally introduced in the mid-1980s by Deci and Ryan (1985) to examine employee motivational factors. Deci and Ryan developed the SDT, which has been used in professional and academic research that relate to employee engagement. SDT relates to natural or intrinsic tendencies to behave in healthy and effective ways. Employee engagement and human behaviours have a connection to the SDT and the essence of work engagement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). An employee's level of engagement derives from his or her being able to control personal behaviours and goals. Disengagement and personal engagement are related to the SDT in that an employee's behavioural state is a key driver of motivation to demonstrating behaviour at the professional and personal levels. The engagement level of employees affects the productivity of an organization. The motivation level of an employee is related to job satisfaction. The emotional state of an employee also relates to motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When employees begin to withdraw, and hide their identities, ideas, and feelings, they become disengaged and defensive, resulting in an adverse effect on work performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Employee engagement strategies implemented by business leaders result in higher levels of

employee engagement (Blattner & Walter, 2015), customer satisfaction, productivity, and profit (Bowen, 2016), and lower levels of employee accidents and turnovers (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Court right, 2014). Business leaders adopt the concept of SDT to enable employees to hold positive attitudes toward their organization (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2014)

Methodology
Impact of Employee Engagement
The failing global economy has created a huge shift in the way business takes place (McCuiston & DeLucenay, 2010). Employee engagement matters to both the employee as well as the organization. Employees can utilize contract agreement provisions to impede the attainment of the organizational goals and objectives. Management's capability to leverage employee engagement strategies is essential in an organization. Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler, and Saks (2014) establishing that high levels of expectations and frequent performance reviews can increase employee participation and cooperation. The scarcity of resources has lead organizations to think more about reducing costs and increasing productivity and efficiency. Reduced variation in processes can reduce cost over time as it relates to process improvement (Emrouznejad, Anouze, & Thanassoulis, 2010); however, an organization must continue to incorporate processes that enhance employee engagement. McCuiston and DeLucenay (2010) noted short-term cost cutting processes are not uniformly successful. Employee engagement has emerged as one of the greatest challenges in today's workplace. With complexities and stringent regulations in many organizations, employee engagement will continue to challenge organizations in the future (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). This aspect challenges management because engagement is a critical element in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability (Albercht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015; Breevaart et al., 2013; Farndale & Murrer, 2015). Organizations that have highly engaged employees have greater profits than those that do not (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2014). Organizations with highly engaged employees experience increased customer satisfaction, profits, and employee productivity (Ahmetoglu, Harding, Akhtar, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015; Carter, 2015; Cooper Thomas et al., 2014; Vandenabeele, 2014).

Leadership
Leaders that are authentic influence the engagement of employees (Nicholas & Erakovich, 2013). Balancing moral perspectives with interpersonal relationships can create a healthy leadership-employee relationship. Employee engagement, a by-product of leadership, is improved when the leader has a direct relationship with employees (Lowe, 2012). Ensuring work engagement and empowerment plays a significant role in employee involvement (Nicholas & Erakovich, 2013). Effective leadership provides vision and direction for employee development (Souba, 2011). The ability for leadership to effectively communicate is a basis for employee engagement. The main focus of employee engagement is the

alignment of the employee with the organizational goals and to go beyond what is expected (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013). Anitha (2014) suggested employee engagement reflects two essential elements: (a) willingness to contribute to organizational success and (b) a positive and energized employee who is at a motivational state (Eldor & Harpaz, 2015). Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, and Lings (2015) defined engagement as the extent in which employees are willing to commit both emotionally and rationally within their organization, how long they are willing to stay as a result of that commitment, and how dedicated they are to their work. Employee engagement is related to the psychological experiences of people who shape their work process and behaviour. Employee engagement is multidimensional; engaged employees are emotionally, physically, and cognitively engaged in their daily work (Eldor & Harpaz, 2015). The organization has the responsibility to provide for the needs of employees by providing proper training and building a meaningful workplace environment; in turn, employees have the responsibility to provide a meaningful contribution to the organization. Many organizations perceive the importance of employee engagement; however, the issue of how to increase the level of employee engagement is not warranted (Wang & Chia-Chun, 2013).

Empowering Employees

The research findings provided clues in identifying the needs and challenges leaders face while empowering employees. All participants indicated that employees desire a challenge in their work and want leaders to trust them in completing their assigned tasks. Further, all participants believed employees should receive the necessary training and resources to do their jobs. Deci and Ryan (1985) referred to competence as the effectiveness and the use of an individual's skills, which allows him or her to work at high levels. Employees that are confident in themselves are confident in their daily work duties. Hynes (2012) suggested leaders employ processes that address employee needs and expectations' concerns, such as corporate culture awareness, team skills development, incentives, and communication. I3 and I4 recommended increasing opportunities for employee empowerment and development. I4 stated employees' opportunity for job advancement and development play a critical role in improving engagement. All participants mentioned that career growth and empowerment were key determinants of job performance and engagement. Changes in empowerment, training, and developmental programs can affect employee engagement. I4 agreed with the company's policy on employee engagement, in that the company provides a variety of development programs to accelerate the employee's career path and gain new leadership skills. I4 further stated that employees that feel empowered to do their jobs and know that there are opportunities for advancement demonstrate increased employee engagement. Career growth and development is one of the predictors of employee engagement. I1 pointed out a strategy used to boost employee engagement by providing quarterly training to ensure employees have all the knowledge needed for high performance. Ledlow and Coppola (2013) claimed mentorship involves openness, equality, and trust between the mentor and the mentee. Vallerand (2012) believed that employee motivation has a direct impact on employee commitment and performance. In accordance with the company's employee engagement

policy, leaders recommend employees for enhanced developmental programs. All participants suggested that recommending employees for enhanced developmental programs has improved employee engagement, in that employees feel leaders care about their success and organizational engagement.

Conclusion

Leaders that are authentic influence the engagement of employees (Nicholas & Erakovich, 2013). To make or maintain their companies' profitability, business leaders must work hard to engage employees (Kortmann et al., 2014). Improved employee engagement is a byproduct of leaders who have a direct relationship with employees (Lowe, 2012). The findings of this research indicated that the bond between leaders and employees is an essential element for engaging employees, which in turn increased organizational profitability. Sadeghi and Pihie (2012) suggested organizations should look for leaders that can both communicate the organization's vision and secure employees' support in achieving organizational goals. Engaged employees deliver improved organizational and individual performance. Tonkham (2013) suggested that leaders become more creative and apply creativity within the workplace. Communication business leaders must understand the need for autonomy, intrinsic rewards, and influence to achieve employee engagement (Bolman & Deal, 2014). Based on the findings from this research, organizations attract employees who are willing to be engaged, which leads to an increase in employee engagement that results in high profitability. Therefore, the organization is less effective when employees are not motivated to do their jobs, as this directly affects job performance. Leaders who implement employee engagement strategies noted (a) higher levels of employee engagement (Blattner & Walter, 2015); (b) improved customer satisfaction, productivity, and profit (Bowen, 2016); and, (c) lower levels of employee accidents and turnovers (Barrick et al., 2014). The study findings indicated leaders who monitor the recurrent reasons employees become disengaged, can provide valuable feedback to improve employee engagement.

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