
WORK ENGAGEMENT: A NATIONAL CHALLENGE WORLDWIDE

Work engagement deserves to be assigned national priority, in view of the declining engagement worldwide. Except in the Latin America, work engagement being reported across the globe is quite low. More than 1/3rd of the work force, outside Latin America has been conceding, in most of the surveys being conducted worldwide across the countries, to be disengaged or poorly engaged. Asymmetries in work engagement being reported across the countries, sectors, industries and age groups are much wide and deserve immediate attention in corporate management as well as in national governance. The widespread nosedive reported in engagement ever since the global meltdown of 2008, also needs to be redressed now after the lapse of these 5 years since the spread of that financial contagion. Indeed, elimination of marginal firms world over due to unabated closure of poor performing units in this ongoing era of neo-liberal economic policies, leading to economic-insecurity also raise question about the continuance of these policies. Better work-engagement of employees with better terms of employment can alone act as a dampener to halt such closures.

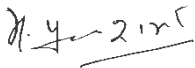
Loss of output worldwide, in terms of the national GDPs on account of poor work engagement is colossal. The gains of securing engagement of every additional percentage of disengaged workforce would be manifold, in view of the synergy of enhanced integration from better engagement. Therefore, effective work engagement interventions can bring miraculous turnaround in the economic performance of nations world over in this era of worstever economic slowdown. "Work Engagement is the state in which employees are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organization as measured by way of putting in discretionary efforts in the form of brainpower, extra time, and energy". Over the past two years, employee engagement across the world, has either declined or stagnated well behind the level of engagement found in the companies performing well in their respective categories. In this age of fierce and growing cross border competition, the organizations around the world need to deliver better performance through ever-greater work engagement for their survival and growth. Though, employee engagement levels worldwide have shown a tentative recovery in 2012, after having fallen since 2007. Yet, the level of engagement is much lower, except in Latin America. Especially, the Europe and the Pacific nations who have been facing worst ever employee disengagement of the century, where the engagement levels have fallen at their lowest ebbs of last one century and just 63 percent of the total work force report engaged. Asia has also been reported to be experiencing consistent decline in employee engagement. India is having the worst engagement level, as, less than 40 percent of the total work force reports engaged. China is having better engagement than India, yet a decline of 19 percent, reported since 2010 is also strange. Probably the Chinese workforce appears to be more worried due to slackening of export demand and stagnating turnovers of the majority of the corporate groups there.

Evidence of positive co-relation between work engagement and job satisfaction also necessitates decent working conditions. It gets enough support from the fact that the high level of engagement in countries like Netherlands, where employee contracts offer high level of employment security is clearly evident that well defined terms of employment with a high level of security, results into high work engagement. In light of this, the proposed dilution of labour laws in countries like India might further affect engagement levels, already low as compared to China and Japan in the continent. The Japanese economy, after having lost almost two decades in terms of economic growth has begun to show signs of marked recovery after the new economic enthusiasm infused by the new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in last 6 months. The engagement level in Japan has got enhanced in last 6 months after Shinzo Abe has assumed power and has given the call, "enrich the economy and strengthen the army" with sustained action in that direction. This enhancement in the engagement level in Japan after more than a decade of low work engagement clearly proves that national governance also has a bearing upon the level of work engagement.

This hypothesis of positive co-relation between national governance and work engagement also gains strength from the high level of work engagement prevailing in South American firms which depict highest engagement at 73 percent of the total work force in 2008, 74 percent in 2009 and 74.6 percent in 2010, compared with 64 to 66 percent of the work force in Europe and the Middle East. The workers in Latin America feel motivated to go beyond their formal job responsibility probably due to new and more independent course being pursued by their leaders. In South America employee pride is also quite high with more than 86 percent employees having a sense of pride to work for their respective companies. Probably, the high extent of work engagement and employee pride has been emerging out of the new course of economic development partly away from the erstwhile neo-liberal economic policies being pursued then in the erstwhile of reforms in conformation with the Washington Consensus. The new unity among the 31 American countries of the global south may also have buoyed the employee perception and ambition.

In light of the renewed buoyancy in work engagement in South America, India too has to pursue a new path of development that can rejuvenate industrial production as well as balance of payment and fiscal balance. The neo-liberal economic policies in India as well, have depressed the manufacturing sector growth to 1.9 percent and the fiscal and current account deficits to explosive levels.

In view of the macroeconomic variables depreciating, work engagement and employee pride, due attention has to be given to enhance macro-economic performance as well, besides using HR interventions. The extent of macro-economic integration achieved in trade and investments across the geopolitical borders worldwide, since 1990s has to be curbed to restore confidence among the workers in corporates worldwide facing threats of closure from cross boarder competition, including clandestine dumping and unfair competition. It is the confidence level and work engagement of masses that has to be given precedence vis-à-vis indiscriminate opening of the economies which has been leading to asymmetries in income levels, employment and macro-economic balance world over. The present state of macro-economic imbalance, declining work engagement and lowering of employee pride needs most urgent attention.



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