

Work Engagement Interventions and their Efficacy

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Abstract

The cost of nurturing disengaged employees can be very high for the corporates. Disengaged employees lack motivation, which clearly reflects in their work. This becomes even worse, when they spread their negativity to their engaged counterparts. Therefore corporates must aim at 100% engagement. This study is an attempt to find out the best or no-fail interventions, so that the engagement levels of the employees can be enhanced. A sample survey was conducted (N-100). A preliminary survey of 10 executives was piloted first, to find out which interventions work well in the Indian corporate sector. On the basis of their consensus, the 14 employee engagement interventions were selected for the study. Data was collected through deliberate sampling on five point scaling through questionnaire. Averages and standard deviation were calculated. Lastly, it was revealed that empowering the employees at workplace, encouragement or backing their personal projects and a rise in their salaries instigate a feeling of engagement the most. Areas which requires improvement were also revealed further.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Interventions, Efficacy, Employees.

Introduction

The modern workplace is changing at a radical and accelerated pace. In the wake of globalization and international competition, the past two decades has witnessed a substantial increase in mergers and acquisitions alongside delayering and downsizing of many organisations. Such forms of restructuring invariably put a negative impact on employees in terms of job losses, job uncertainty, ambiguity and heightened anxiety, which is not necessarily offset by any organizational benefits such as increased productivity and financial profits. (Cartwright, 2006) Therefore now, it has become all the more important, to employ the most talented workforce, and to keep them retained is another difficult and crucial job. Hence, the concept of employee engagement gains even more attention and prerequisite now. Engaged employees are the asset for the companies in this knowledge driven economy, where it is the employee who is emerging as a significant competitive differentiator. Engaged employees become physically involved in their tasks, cognitively alert and emotionally connected to others when performing their jobs. In contrast, disengaged become disconnected from their jobs and hide their true identity, thoughts and feelings during role performances. (Olivier, 2007)

Though, there are a lot of definitions of engagement by academicians, practitioners and scholars, yet there is no universally accepted definition, as they all describe it in their own ways. Academic definitions focus on outcomes of engagement (advocacy, dedication, discretionary effort, fostering change); the psychological state (employees fully involve themselves in work, are absorbed, focused and energised); and the two-way beneficial relationship between employer and employee.

Consultancy based models define engagement as a psychological state with numerous outcomes for the organisation, and consider the role of the organisation in enabling it. Engagement results from having a line of sight between individual and business performance so staff understand their contribution, as well as a culture that values, encourages and listens to staff. (Smith, 2009)

Engagement is defined as employees' willingness and ability to contribute to company success. Put another way, engagement is the extent to which employees "go the extra mile" and put discretionary effort into their work — contributing more of their energy, creativity and passion on the job. (Towers, 2010) The notion of employee engagement is a relatively new one, one that has been heavily marketed by human resource (HR) consulting firms that offer advice on how it can be created and leveraged. Academic researchers are now slowly joining the fray, and both parties are saddled with competing and inconsistent interpretations of the meaning of the construct. (Macey, 2008)

According to Gallup, engaged employees are those who are involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace. Engaged employees believe that they can make a difference in the organizations they work for. Confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities that people possess — in both themselves and others — is a powerful predictor of behavior and subsequent performance. (Seijts, 2006)

Andrew Carnegie once said, "You must capture and keep the heart of the original and supremely able man before his brain can do its best." Although Carnegie wasn't explicitly talking about employee engagement, this quote perfectly illustrates how vital it is to engage your employees so they will be happier and perform to the best of their abilities. Unfortunately, employee engagement is sometimes an afterthought. Instead, engaging employees should be practiced at all levels of the business hierarchy and cultivated on a regular basis. (Abby, 2015)

Employee Engagement Interventions

The concept of employee engagement is gaining more and more consideration and prominence in corporates these days. This concept of employee engagement customarily used to center on employee welfare activities, but due to

recent developments and transformations in corporate sector globally, has redefined the way corporates look at their employees. It has become a more than ever top priority of corporates with an increased focus on employee well-being, employee happiness and employee satisfaction. It is seen as a core business strategy from merely an HR program. Companies have now adopted the formula of "better engagement, better productivity" and thus emphasis on strategies and interventions to increase employee engagement. Following are the interventions that have been included in the study by the researcher.

1. **Encourage personal projects** – Companies in software industry, these days are letting their employees spend some time on their personal projects in order to enhance their creativity and increase their commitment and engagement towards the organisation.
2. **Assign mentor for discrete groups of people** – Disengaged employees often drag down the morale and performance potential of the engaged ones, affecting the overall work quality. A good mentoring in such situation helps the employees in becoming more clear and focused about their roles and goals for themselves as well as for their organisation.
3. **Have team photos** – To motivate and inspire employees for better engagement, managers need to encourage them for their achievements, success and other events by keeping their records via pictures, and posting them on walls of fame and other various places to acknowledge them.
4. **Encourage volunteering** – Volunteering is an important aspect of work engagement. Employees who volunteer, usually display a sense of satisfaction with their progress in career, which facilitates more commitment and engagement of employees towards their work.
5. **Salary rise** – Employees in the organisations are intensely influenced by the compensation structure of it. These monetary rewards- pay and benefits, play a major role in retaining the employees, and in the desire of continuing these benefits, employees try to involve more of themselves into the work.
6. **Reminding people of company's mission and values** – Instilling company pride and values in the employees have a positive impact on their commitment. By communicating company's missions and goals, employees get a meaning to their work and thus they become strongly engaged with the organisation and their work as well.
7. **Recognise and encourage innovations** – Most of the employees with the organisation are millennial today. These millennial are more open-minded towards

change and innovations. Encouraging them to express their ideas foster the feeling of attachment with the organisation.

8. **Celebrate achievements** – Just as, “Many drops together form the ocean”, many employees together form an organisation, and hence their achievements and successes contributes to the success of the organisation. Therefore it is momentous to celebrate their achievements and success to boost their morale and make them feel valued.
9. **Celebrate people** – Getting acknowledged and celebrated give employees a reason to work more productively. Celebrating birthdays, promotions, retirements, etc. reflect the warm work culture and reduce absenteeism to a certain extent. These celebrations leave employees with a sense of belongingness and emotional commitment.
10. **Give and receive feedback** – Feedbacks impose a major impact on engagement. When employees receive positive feedback, they are likely to engage actively in their work. Even those employees who receive a negative feedback are also found engaged, but those who receive little or no feedback are likely to be actively disengaged. Receiving feedback from employees is also equally important, as it’s important to know their opinion as well. Hence a two-way feedback is very essential for engagement at work.
11. **Showing respect** – Most employers respect their employees’ opinions, ideas and working style. When employees get the respect they deserve from their leaders, they are less likely to leave the company. As in many cases, it has been seen that employees who quit their jobs, were unhappy with their boss.
12. **Empowering employees** – Employees when given the freedom or the power to make decisions, see themselves as a valued part of the organisation and feel greater responsibility towards the organisation. Sometimes this collective decision also brings new perspective and ideas in the work, and this involvement leads to better commitment, better engagement and better productivity.
13. **Encouragement to learning** – A good manager always keep its employees encouraged towards learning, the constant learning of employees keeps them up-to-date and develops excellence in their areas, which is reflected in the company’s overall performance and employee’s engagement towards their job and organisation.
14. **To get social with employees** – In order to engage employees in work, it is a prerequisite for leaders to engage with them socially. This type of culture at work boosts a feeling of belongingness and helps in retaining employees.

Table 1 Analysis of Employee Engagement Interventions

Employee Engagement Interventions	Score (In %)	Rank	Standard Deviation
Encourage personal projects	4.6	2	0.20
Assign mentor for discrete groups of people	2.28	13	0.37
Have team photos	3.92	5	0.48
Encourage volunteering	2.8	14	0.35
Salary rise	4.42	3	0.23
Reminding people of company’s mission and vision	2.60	12	0.19
Recognise and encourage innovations	3.60	8	0.14
Celebrate achievements	3.72	7	0.13
Celebrate people	2.64	11	0.33
Give and receive feedback	2.98	10	0.26
Showing respect	3.97	4	0.30
Empowering the employees	5	1	0
Encouragement to learning	3.14	9	0.45
Getting social with the employees	3.83	6	0.32

Interpretation

Empowering the employees gives the highest engagement of all other above mentioned interventions, it was assigned highest significance unanimously by the respondents with the score of 5%, since the standard deviation is also zero, which means all the respondents shared the same opinion that by empowering employees at the workplace, they feel highly engaged. The second most important intervention in the opinion of the respondents was encouraging personal projects. This intervention secured 4.6 % score, the standard deviation is also low i.e. 0.20, which reveals that majority of the respondents were having their opinion around this score, and agreed that when their personal projects are encouraged by the employers, they feel more engaged with their work and workplace. Though salary is a major factor for the employees but, here it is clear that for some employees salary is not just everything. The Rise in salary intervention has scored 4.42%, but the standard deviation is little high as compared to the previous two interventions, which states there is little deviation in the opinion of respondents, but still majority of the respondents have considered it as a major source of engagement, by putting it at the third position.

Showing respect to employees is also very important variable at the workplace for most of the respondents, as it has secured fourth position with 3.97% score and 0.30 standard deviation. This standard deviation shows that it is a significant variable for engagement to majority, but to some respondents it did not hold much significance. The fifth most important intervention according to the respondents is team photos. This variable scored 3.92%, but the standard deviation of 0.48 shows that the opinion is highly varied, the respondents were divided in their responses and therefore the standard deviation is very high. The intervention occupying sixth position is getting social with employees, by securing 3.83% score, the standard deviation is not too high but also not too low, which means most of the respondents have agreed to it, but still some of the respondents have shown a denial for this variable to be an important element for engagement.

Celebration of the achievements of employees is also unanimously agreed by most of the respondents as the standard deviation is quite low and the score is 3.72%. The next intervention in the sequence is recognizing and encouraging innovation. It has secured a score of 3.60% and since the standard deviation is 0.14, which means majority of the respondents has convergence of opinion, and they believe the equal proportion of this intervention upon their engagement levels. The ninth most important intervention in the opinion of the respondents is encouragement to learning. It has secured 3.14% but the standard deviation is relatively high, which means here again the respondents are having a divergence of opinion. To some it is a significant variable of

engagement while to some respondents it is just an HR activity, and they don't see it as a stimulus for engagement.

The intervention giving and receiving feedback has secured a score of 2.98% and it also share the same opinion by the respondents, as it scores a relatively low standard deviation of 0.26. Majority of the respondents agree to its impact upon their engagement levels. Celebrating people's birthdays, retirements, promotions etc. also have impact on employee engagement but not to a great extent. It secured quite a low score of 2.64, but the respondents here again shared a varied opinion as the standard deviation is not too low. Reminding employees of company's mission and values is also not a very influential intervention in the opinion of the respondents, as it secured a low score of 2.60%. Besides the low standard deviation also shows that most of the respondents have agreed to it.

The last two interventions in the opinion of the respondents are assigning mentor and encouraging volunteering respectively. Both these interventions have secured a low, rather the lowest scores of 2.28% and 2.8% respectively, but high standard deviation has been seen in both the interventions, stating that not all the respondents agree to it, there is a divergence in the opinions of respondents but majority of them have assigned lowest significance to them, affirming lowest possible engagement.

Conclusion

The strongest intervention, which is likely to have a higher positive impact on engagement than others is empowering the employees. This empowerment encourages them for better work and better engagement. However, it has a limitation but among other interventions, it works best with the employees. Though some divergence has been seen in the opinion of respondents among other interventions, but a strong alignment has been seen on the interventions like celebrating achievements, encouraging and recognising innovations, encouraging personal projects. A new viewpoint that has come across in the study is the comparatively lesser impact of salary rise upon engagement. Nevertheless salary rise is the most significant variable for retention but for engagement, employees prefer empowerment and encouragement for personal project over salary rise.

Suggestions

For a sustainable growth of the organisations, executives must promote and adopt these interventions. The corporates can take an idea, that which intervention works best with the employees. Executives must also focus on personal development and career growth of the employees apart from the official projects and assignments to enhance the engagement and sustainability. Also they must not neglect the disengaged employees, rather should aim at engaging

them too with the help of these interventions. These results provide a valuable context for the corporate's in understanding their workforce's needs and inclinations more broadly.

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