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EMERGING TRENDS IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

*E*mployee Engagement is not a new concept and its effect has been manifesting itself even in olden days when managements and employees came together. But this concept attracted the attention of research scholars and management experts only in the recent periods, particularly after the advent of the concept of rationalization of commercial or industrial operations in the large scale. Again, this concept got currency and publicity among research scholars in particular only after 1990 when Kahn conceptualised it and explained its ramifications. Much has been studied and written by different authors and research scholars since then and the imperative need of ensuring employees-management relations has been proved beyond doubt not only for "employees satisfaction but also for customers" satisfaction. Among the different factors leading to Employee Engagement aspect, attraction and retention hold the key. The main factor which motivates employees to continue in any organisation is a healthy environment in which they work and this depends on a variety of factors.

KEYWORDS :*Employee Engagement, Job Satisfaction, Customer Satisfaction, Attraction, Retention, burnout and Employee Turnover*

INTRODUCTION

In any programme of economic development, human resource has a vital role for the successful achievement of the desired goals. The greater realisation of the importance of investment in human assets, particularly in industrial or commercial organisations, has influenced all concerned to give much accent on HRD matters. In any IT unit, in particular, the role of an HR person is crucial in ensuring healthy working environment. It is in this context that the topic of Employee Engagement in any economic activity assumes greater significance.

The job satisfaction of employees or workers in an organisation is a keenly felt need since its very inception, and it also works in favour of ensuring customer satisfaction and enhancing its profitability. Such a situation is not something new. It is not an old wine in new bottle, and it existed wherever there was a workforce in operation in an organisation. From the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata we find that the soldiers who fought for the king and their country there existed a kind of engagement among them. If there was no engagement then they might not have fought the battle and given their lives for their country. Where there is a group of workers doing a work together, there is engagement. But the Employee Engagement concept, as we

come to understand it today, got wide currency and publicity only in the recent periods. The concept Employee Engagement was given a theoretical base by Kahn (1990). In the recent years much thinking and attention have been paid to this subject with the result that it has been conceptualised and the factors influencing it have been analysed at different levels. An attempt is made to highlight certain aspects of this subject as revealed in the studies made by certain researchers and management experts because of its strategic importance in the realm of all productive sectors of the economy.

Employee Engagement is one of the important topics in Human Resource Management. It is supposed to be a mantra for success in today's work place. It is the leading organizations' self interest to measure, monitor and maximize the level of engagement amongst their employees.

Employee Engagement is a valuable concept for understanding and improving individual and organisational performance. In the current business environment, Employee Engagement is vital because organizations are demanding more from their worker than ever before. Employee engagement has been the focus of great interest in management and human resource management publications in recent years. The current interest in Employee Engagement has resulted in advocating the following view:

If an organisation wants to come out of the recession and attract the best staff, then employee engagement has to be a factor they focus on. It"s a strategic imperative. (Greig Aitken cited in Higginbottom, 2009)

The current level of interest and encouraging reviews from the media are creating a positive reputation for what is still a very new concept throughout management practice (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Employee Engagement has become a hot topic in recent years. Despite thisthere remains a paucity of critical academic literature on the subject and relatively little is known about how Employee Engagement can be influenced by Management.

An organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires two-way relationship between the employer and the employee. Thus Employee Engagement is a barometer that determines a person's association with the organization. The challenge today is not just retaining talented people, but fully engaging them, capturing their mind and hearts at each stage of their work. Employers who are engaged in their work and committed to their organization give companies a competitive advantage, including higher productivity and lower employee turnover because of their motivational level and their loyalty and trust toward their employers. Thus it is not surprising that organizations of all sizes and types have invested substantially in policies and practices that foster engagement and commitment in their workforces.

Quantum Workplace in its 2013 Employee Engagement Trends Report shows year-over-year aggregate trends, regional and industry trends, analysis of the components having the greatest impact on engagement, employees' preferences for recognition, and the effect of engagement on retention, profits, and sales. The key findings of this Report include:

➢ Engagement still remains lower than the level found prior to the late 2008 recession.
➢ Employees at higher levels within organizations are more engaged than those at lower levels.
➢ Organizations reporting increased profits had a higher level of engaged employees than organisations with declining profits.
➢ The top three drivers of engagement viz (1) Quality of life, (2) Work , (3) Company policies and practices have remained constant for the past six years.
➢ Trust in senior leaders has the greatest impact on an organization's overall level of engagement; however, only one in five organizations excels in this area.

➢ Perception of employee recognition varies drastically between engaged and disengaged employees, as well as between executives and employees.

The origin of the concept of Employee Engagement Employee Engagement has been theorised and conceptualised by authors like Erving offman (1961), Hochschild (1983), Brown (1996) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975). The starting point is identified by Goffman (1962 cited in Kahn, 1990) who conducted studies on employees' ability to attach or detach themselves from their role or work place. The term —Engagement" is rooted in the role theory, in particular in the work of Erving Goffman. Role theory studies the various roles individuals occupy in society, as well as the social expectation and behavioural boundaries attributed to such roles (Bailey and Yost, 2007). Goffman defined Engagement as the —spontaneous investment in the role" and a —visible investment of attention and muscular effort.

This person-role relationship spoke of aspects that later formed a basic structure of Kahn's three areas of Employee Engagement. This topic has been highlighted by many different authors and many different theories have emerged. For example, the social scientist Csikszentmihalyi wrote about the idea of the _flow' which is the blurring of self and role, where the person loses the notions of self and becomes fully entwined and immersed in the activity they are currently engaging in. Festinger (1954 cited in Buunk, Colling, Taylor van, Yperen and Dak of 1990) who introduced the idea that when individuals are uncertain about their own abilities and situation they will actively compare themselves against others. This concept of social comparison can be linked to Employee Engagement through the culture of the organization; employees who are unsure how to determine their own feelings of engagement or _attachment' as Goffman suggests will turn to the people around them in order to gain their own perspective. Thus if the culture of an organization does not support Employee Engagement a vicious circle of disengagement may present itself.

From these assumptions and theories it can be seen that the likelihood of Employee Engagement relies on the employees' ability or willingness to openly merge or fully give themselves to their work and as seen through other theories there are many external variables that can impinge on the employee willingness to invest into the role.

Saks (2006) has argued that a stronger theoretical rationale can be found in the Social Exchange Theory (SET) for explaining Employee Engagement. According to this theory when individuals receive economic and socio-emotional resources from their organization, they feel obliged to respond in kind and repay the organization (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). According to Saks the amount of cognitive, emotional and physical resources an individual is prepared to devote to the performance of one's work role is contingent on the economic, social and emotional resources received from the organization. A basic tenet of SET is that relationship grows over time into trusting, loyal and mutual pledges as long as the parties stand by certain —rules" of exchange. Hence, one way for individuals to repay their organization is through their level of engagement.

Employee Engagement: Definitions

Ever since its evolution numerous definitions and meanings of Employee Engagement have emerged, and these are listed below:

People can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform. Personal engagement refers to harnessing of the individual self with the work role; the more people draw on their selves to perform their roles, the more stirring are their performances. -

Kahn (1990).

> Engagement, as an opposite of burnout, is characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their job. - Maslach & Leiter (1997).

> Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective - cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour. - Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker (2002).

> Engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for work. - Harter, Schmidt & Hayes (2002).

> Engagement refers to high levels of activity, initiative, and responsibility. - Dvir, Eden, Avolio & Shamir (2002).

> A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. - Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004).

> Engagement refers to high internal motivational state. - Colbert, Mount. Harter, Witt & Barrick (2004).

> Employee engagement refers to the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employees in their jobs. - Frank, Finnegan & Taylor (2004).

> Engagement refers to the extent to which people value, enjoy and believe in what they do. -DDI (2005).

> Employee engagement includes several key issues like

• Attitude or behaviour

• Individual or group phenomenon

• Relationship with constructs

• Measurement issues of the construct – Little and Little (2006)

> Employee engagement is the illusive force that motivates employees to higher levels of performance. It refers to the feelings or attitudes employees have toward their jobs and organisations. -Wellins & Concclman (2007).

> Employee engagement concept is distinguished into three namely state, trait, and behavioural engagement. Engagement is looked attitudinally and behaviourally. –Macey and Schneider (2008).

> An engaged employee is someone who feels involved, committed, passionate, and empowered and demonstrates those feelings in work behaviour. - Mone & London (2010).

Approaches to Employee Engagement

The four major approaches defined in the academic perspective about the existing state of Employee Engagement:

+ Kahn's (1990) Need-Satisfying Approach
+ Maslach et al's (2001) Burnout-Antithesis Approach
+ Harter et al's (2002) Satisfaction-Engagement Approach and
+ Sak's (2006) Multidimensional Approach

These approaches are briefly explained below:
Kahn's (1990) Need-Satisfying Approach:

Kahn is widely credited with the first application and use of engagement theory to the workplace (Harter et al.,2002; Rich et al.,2010). The term engagement used specifically to describe a worker's involvement in various tasks at work was first published in Kahn' article —Psychological conditions of personal engagement and Disengagement at work —which appeared in a 1990 edition of the Academy of Management Journal.

In his ethnographic study Kahn interviewed 32 employees,16 summer camp counsellors and 16 financial professionals to explore how their experiences with various work variables (ie. Manager satisfaction, role clarity, availability of resources) influenced their experience and involvement with work tasks, ultimately influencing pre-eminent thoughts about what would be known in the popular press as Employee Engagement.

Kahn wrote that engagement in work was thought to be a motivational variable spanning the extrinsic and intrinsic continuum, promoting the use of an employee's full self in their work roles. Kahn went on to define engagement as — the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's ‗Preferred Self' in task behaviours that promote connections to work and his personal presence, and active full role performance‖. In addition to using one's full self in work, Kahn suggested that an employee could be physically engaged, emotionally engaged and cognitively engaged (Rich) and that these states of being were affected significantly by three psychological domains: Meaningfulness, Safety and Availability. Meaningfulness was defined as the positive —sense of return on investment of self in role performance‖ (Kahn). In Kahn's conceptualisation the meaningfulness variable completed a circular model where employees added significance to an organisation. Safety was defined as the ability to show one's self —without fear or negative consequences to self image, status or career‖ (Kahn). For Kahn safety revolved around each employee's need to trust their working environment Cognitively, Emotionally and Behaviourally as well as the need to reasonably understand what was expected of them at work.

Last, Availability was defined as the —sense of possessing the physical, emotional and psychological resources necessary‖ (Kahn) to complete one's work. For the availability variable he suggested that employee's must feel they have the tool to complete their work or that at a minimum, these tools can and will be obtained for them.

Maslach et al's (2001) Burnout-Antithesis Approach

In a second perspective, Maslach et al conceptualized Employee Engagement as the positive antithesis to burnout, defining engagement as — a persistent positive affective state...... characterised by high levels of activation and pleasure‖ . At that time the burnout literature was dominated by two characteristics:

a. Burnout was closely linked with professionals where employees were responsible for interacting with people in stressful situations (ie. health care, customer relations).

b. It was understood as the antithesis to job engagement (Maslach et al). As a reflection of the exclusive focus the field of psychology had placed on finding cures for diseases (i.e. epression, psychosocial personality disorder, Seligman 2002), researchers in the burnout literature began considering the role of well-being as a function of engagement and a strategy for optimizing human strength. Burnout was thought to be the erosion of engagement. What was one important, meaningful and challenging work became unpleasant, unfulfilling and meaningless (Maslach et al., P-416). Moreover, engagement was

operationalized as the reverse of scores on the Maslach Burn Out Inventory (MBI-GS Maslach and Leiter, 1997). Accordingly engagement was characterized as the opposite of three burnout dimensions: Exhaustion, Cynicism and Ineffectiveness.

The domain of Exhaustion represented the central quality of burnout and the overt form of its manifestation. Exhaustion was defined as ―being over extended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources‖ (Maslach et al., P.399).

Cynicism was defined as ―a negative callous or an excessively detached response to various aspects of the job‖ (Maslach et al., P.399). By depersonalizing various aspects of the job, an employee might choose to ignore qualities that make those works unique and human. Ineffivectiveness was understood to be the direct result of Exhaustion and Cynicism and was defined as feelings of incompetence and lack of achievement and productivity at work. Employees who experienced exhaustion and cynicism were thought to be more likely to experience a sense of ineffectiveness as they focused more on the challenge they perceived to be facing .

Harter et al., (2002) Satisfaction- Engagement Approach

In a third perspective and as an outgrowth of the positive psychological movement of the early 21st century, Harter et al., published one of the most widely read and cited pieces of literature on Employee Engagement. Using the positive psychological frame work, Harter et al., used a massive deposit of data (N-7939 business units) held at the Gallup organization to conduct meta-analytic procedures on Employee Engagement within multiple fields of industry. Gallup researchers went on to define Employee Engagement as an ―individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work‖ (Harter et al., P.417). Using the Gallup Work Audit (GWA) , a well recognized and proprietary 12-item questionnaire (Buckingham and Coffman,1999), results suggested Employee Engagement had a positive relationship to important business outcomes such as customer satisfaction (r = .33), turnover (r = -.36), safety (r = - .32), productivity (r = - .20), and profitability (r = - .17).

Luthans and Peterson (2002) extended Harter et al., model by examining the relationship between managerial self-efficacy, the perception of effective management practices and Employee Engagement. Using GWA (N = 2900) and several measures developed specifically for their study result suggested a positive relationship between Employee Engagement and manager self-efficacy cores when managers rated employee effectiveness (r = .33) and when supervisors rated their manager's level of effectiveness (r = .89). Luthans and Peterson concluded that the most profitable work units of companies have people doing what they do best, with people they like and with a strong sense of Psychological ownership (P.370). Findings from their research extended current theory about a manager role in creating supportive psychological climate and parallel early theories of engagement (Kahn, Maslach et al., Schaufeli, Salanova et al.,).

Saks' (2006) Multidimensional Approach

The fourth and final approach to Employee Engagement emerged from a perspective of Employee Engagement. Saks hypothesized that Employee Engagement developed through a Social Exchange Model and was the first academic researcher to suggest separate states of Engagement, Job Engagement and Organizational Engagement. In his conceptualization, Saks defined the multidimensional concept of Employee Engagement as ―a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components....associated with individual role performance‖ . This definition was inclusive of previous literature uggesting that Employee Engagement was developed from Cognitive (Kahn, Maslach et al., Maslow), Emotional (Harter et al., Kahn) and Behavioural elements (Harter et al., Kahn , Maslach et al.,) and extended current thinking on the topic

by developing a three component model.

To test his model (Cognitive- Emotional- Behavioural) Saks enrolled 102 working students in his study who were attending a graduate course at a large Canadian University. Result indicated a positive relationship between the antecedent variables of job characteristics perceived organization support and procedural justice (r = -.37; r = -.36; r = -.18). Furthermore it was reported that Job Satisfaction, Organization Commitment and Intention to

quit had an outcome relationship with Employee Engagement (r = .26; r = .17; r = - .22). Perceived supervisor support and rewards and recognition were also tested with antecedents variables but no statistical significance was indicated. Results from the Saks study suggested that antecedent variables such as supportive climate, job characteristics and fairness influenced the development of engagement and Employee Engagement mediated the relationship between antecedent and outcome variables. This research extended Schaufeli, Salanova et al's model of engagement by suggesting engagement could be experienced Emotionally and Cognitively and manifested Behaviourally.

Lastly, Shuck and Wollard (2010) conducted a historical analysis of Employee Engagement. Resulting from the review of 159 articles, the researchers defined Employee Engagement, specifically for the field of HRD, as a Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural state of organizational outcomes. This definition used the multidimensional framework espoused by Saks but was inclusive of early research on engagement (Kahn, Maslach et al., Schaufeli, Salanova et al.,) and grounded in emerging frameworks (Macey et al., Macey and Schneider, Saks).

Benefits of Employee Engagement

An organization's capacity to manage Employee Engagement is closely related to its ability to achieve high performance and superior business results, at individual and organizational levels.

Individual
- Acts as a motivational driver for the employee.
- The employees learn about the sustainability and they will stay with the company, be an advocate of the company and its product and services, and contribute to bottom line business success.
- Employee's interest in work will be increased.
- An employee receives certain compensation and benefits.
- Feeling of belongingness for the organization they form an emotional connection with company.
- The employees have professional development.
- The employees have their perspectives broadened.
- The employees have rational understanding and willingness to work.

Organizational
- Increased employee competency.
- Enhanced corporate pride.
- Motivational driver helps the employee more than pay benefits which is a positive insight for the organization.
- The hands on experience involvement of the employees will help the organization in finding an easy solution to its problem.
- Protecting and enhancing the public reputation of the organization.
- The goals and vision of employees as well as the organization are aligned which leads to increased productivity.
- The business can expect better per-person productivity, reduced absenteeism and customer

loyalty.
- ✦ The organization can reduce shrinkage and employee turnover to some extent.
- ✦ Becoming an employer of choice.
- ✦ The organization can limit its investment in recruitment development and retention to certain extent.

Drivers of Employee Engagement

According to the _Trends in Global Employee Engagement", by Aon Hewitt, 2011, the key engagement drivers are as below:

1. Quality of life
- Physical Work Environment
- Work-Life Balance

2. Work
- Work Activities
- Sense of Accomplishment
- Resources
- Processes

3. Company Practices
- Policies & Practice
- Performance Management
- Brand Alignment
- Company Reputation
- Diversity

4. People
- Senior Leadership
- Managers
- Colleagues
- Valuing people
- Customers

5. Total Rewards
- Pay
- Benefits
- Recognition

6. Opportunities
- Career Opportunities
- Training & Development

Towers Perrin identifies the following drivers of engagement in their order of importance:
- Senior management's interest lies in his employees' well –being
- Challenging work
- Decision- making authority
- Proof that the company is focused on customers
- Career advancement opportunities
- A collaborative work environment where people work well in group

• Resources to get the job done
• A clear vision from senior management about future achievement.

Development Dimensions International Inc. (DDI) identifies three main drivers of egagement:
• Right employees in right jobs
• Organization system and strategies
• Excellent leadership.

Mercer, a global consulting firm, in their report —What's Working—identified key drivers of engagements in India, they are:
• Confidence in senior management
• Paid fairly given performance
• Directorial reputation for customer support
• Sense of personal achievement
• Regular feedback on performance
• Sound workload.

Kenexa Research Institute identifies that the top drivers are:
• Support for work/ life balance
• Safety is a priority
• Excited at work
• Confidence in organization's senior leaders
• Satisfied with recognition
• Corporate responsibility that increase overall satisfaction
• Satisfied with on- the- job training
• Manager who value employees with respect and dignity.

Factors Leading to Employee Engagement

Attraction and retention are found to be the functions of Employee Engagement. Studies indicate that engaged employees are not likely to leave an organization. High level retention of employees is the characteristic feature of a highly engaged workforce. Thus the factors influencing, or rather leading to, Employee Engagement are attraction and retention. These factors provide a basis for organizations to design the pattern of workforce and in shaping a healthy work environment.

A study concerning the global workforce has revealed that four out of every five workers are not delivering their full potential to help their organization succeed. To understand what actors engage employees, the study further revealed 10 factors. These factors are listed below in descending order of influence (Gebauer & Lowman 2009).
1. Senior management's sincere interest in employee wellbeing,
2. The opportunity an employee has to improve skills and capabilities,
3. The organization's reputation for social responsibility,
4. The opportunity an employee has to provide input into decision making in his/her department,
5. The organization's ability to resolve customer concerns quickly,
6. An individual employee's own readiness to set high personal standards,
7. Excellent career advancement opportunities,
8. An individual employee's interest in challenging work assignments,

9. An individual's relationship with his or her supervisor, and

10. The organization's encouragement of innovative thinking.

CONCLUSION

Employee Engagement is not a new subject but it existed much earlier when men started to work in groups. Engagement is old one but then it got its name Employee Engagement and popularity by Kahn. It is not an old wine in new bottle, its a topic that is currently being greeted with positive reviews and support as well as scrutiny and speculation. Several scholars have suggested the conceptualization of engagement as _old wine in a new bottle' or as a _new blend of old wine' . Others have suggested that engagement has hints of a new wine that provides —incremental validity over job attitudes in predicting performance" . Whether engagement is old wine, a new blend or something different remains to be definitively stated in any field, by examining this seems to caught the attention of scholars and practitioners alike as its outcome will be profitable for the organization. The concept of Employee Engagement is only one example of the power we have as HRD professionals to influence the world in which we live.

Kerala had once earned the dubious distinction of a troublesome State due to rampant trade unionism and frequent labour troubles discouraged outside parties in investing here. Much has been talked about the labour situation in the State, and its negative impact on industrial development in this part of the country. The Employee Engagement aspect has not attracted the attention of research workers here so far. There is scope for conducting studies in selected units to arrive at some meaningful conclusions which could be generalised for the well being of the entire industrial scenario in the State.

The concept of Employee Engagement is only one example of the power the HRD professionals have to influence the world in which we live. The Employee Engagement concept is an old one, but the subject of Employee Engagement attracted the attention of research workers and management experts since 1990 when Kahn conceptualised it. It is not an _old wine in new bottle', and the topic is currently being greeted with positive reviews and support as well as speculation and scrutiny. Several scholars have suggested the conceptualisation of Engagement as —old wine in a new bottle" or as a —new blend of old wine" ; others have suggested that Engagement has hints of a new wine or a new blend of something different which would provide — incremental validity over job attitudes in predicting performance.

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