

Mechanism of Improved Performance: Intrinsic Motivation and Employee Engagement

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Abstract

Synthesizing the literature on employee engagement in terms of intrinsic motivation and task purpose, this study provides insights into the critical process of individual's work engagement. Despite the availability of substantial research work in emphasizing the role of engagement in predicting organization desirable outcomes, there is a need for understanding the psychological process that involves while employee engages with the work. Present paper underlines the importance of four key engagement initiatives such as decision making authority, empowering to share ideas and opportunities to develop and utilize employee talent and leadership in driving engagement through a process of motivation.

Key Words : *Employee Engagement, Psychological need satisfaction, Motivation, Job resources*



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Organizations are advancing in a rapid pace through a continuous improvement in technology and business activities in the sophisticated world of information. Adopting a successful path created by the competitors, is not a big challenge but attracting and retaining talented employees is a major issue. In this knowledge era, employees are quite competitive with requisite skills and knowledge. Managing such potential employees is not an easy task, it requires a true effort from, the organizations. In addition, attractive external opportunities with better compensation and incentive benefits lead to an increase in employee expectations to deliver their best performance at current organization. To engage employees for a quality performance output, the shift in focus from financial supplements to psychological fulfilment aspects, is required.

To elaborate on this, a question arises why to engage employees? How do they address the key challenges confronting organizations? An engaged employee is defined

as “someone who feels involved, committed, passionate and empowered and demonstrates those feelings in work behaviour”(Mone and London, 2010, p.17). It is evident from the literature that engagement is a powerful tool in retaining potential employees, reducing absenteeism rate and increasing productivity, profitability and customer loyalty (Gallup, 2013). As a whole, engagement is a theme of contemporary importance for guaranteed business success.

Besides its role in organizational achievement, the growing interest in the concept also unearthed the difficulty in engaging employees. It was reported in *Economic Times* (2014) that only nine percent of employees are engaged with their employers in India. Further with an emphasis on its effect on productivity, stated that “India has employee engagement challenges which are directly impacting the productivity of its workforce.” Therefore, it is imperative to understand the causation behind diminished employee engagement and key engagement drivers that result in persistent productivity. Current study attempts to contribute to the body of knowledge by explaining the role of psychological fulfilment in driving engagement through a process of motivation.

Nature of Employee Engagement

Before moving on to the actual process, it is important to understand the nature of the concept. Employee engagement is identified to be inconstant (Tejaswi and Raya, 2014). Individual engagement with the work role may vary due to multiple unfavourable conditions. Kahn (1990) the first author to introduce the concept of engagement at workplace, explained the variability of engagement levels at two extremes-personal engagement and disengagement.

- Personal engagement refers to “harnessing of organization member’ selves to the work roles. The notion was people integrate with the role physically, cognitively and emotionally by employing and expressing themselves at work.
- Personal disengagement refers to “uncoupling of selves from work roles,” which means people tend to defend themselves to not to integrate with the role.

Later Gallup institution developed a concrete model that explains three levels of engagement. The top most level is:

- ‘Engaged’- Employees who are engaged are passionate, put forth the discretionary effort at work. They are the organization’s most desirable employees, who consistently show innovation and commitment.
- ‘Not engaged’- They are sleep walkers, act as if they were working but actually not. They contribute minimal effort and energy.
- ‘The disengaged’-These employees are the biggest liability for an organization, as they are the unhappiest people who intend to spread their unhappiness to others and cause for decreased employee contribution and satisfaction.

The model also explains that employees who are not engaged may turn into engaged, when management creates the right opportunities and guides them the path to achieve their personal goals. However, disengaged employees no longer benefit organization in any form unless they are retrenched.

Further, the same employee who engages today may not engage in a same extent tomorrow (Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2011; Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, and Hetland, 2012). The reason behind the fluctuations in daily engagement levels gives us insights into the psychological process. Macey, Schneider, Barbera, and Young (2011) in the process of explaining the distinction between engagement and satisfaction brought out the main ingredient which makes an employee personally feel engaged and also evident to others in the form of behavioural outcome. That is the individual’s positive energy invested to focus, put effort and get completely absorbed into the work. The notion is that engagement is a process that involves in a continuous generation of state and behavioural energy that helps keep employee to connect physically, mentally and cognitively to the task performing. The personal energy needed for employee integration may not remain stable as several factors hinder the physical and psychological wellbeing of an employee such as work pressure, emotional demands, burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014) and necessitates motivating employees to best utilize their personal energy in the form of engagement.

Motivation- Human Behaviour

A closer view of research in the area gives us interesting insights on how motivation plays a vital role in driving engagement. Motivation by virtue of its nature is energising, directive, and consequence oriented (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). The self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000a) and theory X of McGregor (1957), the two macro theories of human motivation assume that people are inherently proactive, energetic and persistent. It is the social conditions around the individuals which result them to be passive and alienated.

Motivation is said to be a non-unitary phenomenon, which means the type of motivation as well as the level of motivation varies (Ryan and Deci, 2000b). Perhaps the fluctuations in the engagement levels may be directly proportional to the variability in motivation. Further self-determination theory explains two types of motivation- Intrinsic and extrinsic. The individual's propensity to achieve something because it is inherently interesting and enjoyable is referred to as intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000b), which means the activity itself acts as a reward without any external drive. When motivation comes from outside the individual, it is referred to as extrinsic motivation.

McGregor's (1957) work underlines the mechanism of motivation. The variability in motivational impact is due to the change in employee expectations. When people seek for external rewards such as monetary benefits, probably extrinsic motivation plays a significant role in driving his/her positive energy. Similarly when people expect for opportunities at work to satisfy their psychological thirst for progressing further such as autonomy and feeling of competence (psychological need satisfaction), intrinsic motivation may take the role (Ryan and Deci, 2000a). Hence it is stated that people get motivated either because they

value the activity or by an external coercion. The three decades of research by Ryan and Deci also identified that the quality of performance and experience improves with employee response to the intrinsic rewards compared to the extrinsic rewards (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).

Psychological Need Satisfaction

Hackman and Oldham (1980) worked on motivational impact of job characteristics on employee goal achievement and stated that psychological need satisfaction has intrinsic and extrinsic motivational potential that fosters employees to meet their goals, in turn, employees may become more committed to their jobs because they derive fulfilment from it. Kenneth (2009) in his book *'Intrinsic motivation at work- what really drives employee engagement'* has given important insights with regard to intrinsic rewards that drive employee engagement. The book emphasises on four intrinsic reward - meaningful work, personal growth, competence, and choice. Employee would get a sense of fulfilment when he/she is assigned with meaningful work activities, when there is an opportunity for choosing the activities of interest, when there is an opportunity to grow personally and feeling of competence from goal achievement which ultimately enhances employee engagement. However, it is important to understand, people and their needs differ. The activity that motivates an individual may not motivate another one (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).

Drivers of Employee Engagement- Motivational Process

As of now the paper highlighted the theoretical literature that shed light on importance of motivation in driving engagement. Let us see some empirical evidences that show motivational potential of organizational factors that result in enhanced engagement levels.

Drivers	Psychological need	Description	Empirical Evidences
Decision Making authority	Sense of involvement, autonomy and valued	Opportunity to make right decision concerning one's own work tap individual to personally accept the challenges involved in the task handling, enable employee to seek best possible solution for resolving a problem. Gives an opportunity to analyse one's own potential. On a whole gives a sense of involvement and valued for the given opportunity.	Tower Perrin (2003); Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004); Sandeep, Mark, Chris, Emma, and Katie, (2008); Lawler and Worley, (2006)
Opportunities for Growth and Development	Sense of competence, Sense of Personal growth	Employees seek for opportunities to learn and update with emerging skills and knowledge. Leadership must understand their aspirations and learning ability there by needs to provide right opportunities to leverage their skills through training programmes, succession planning or managerial development programmes.	Aon Hewit (2013); Lockwood (2007); Aitken, Marks, Purcell, Woodruffe, and Worman, (2006); Tower Perrin, (2003).
Empowerment and Fair treatment	Sense of valued and involved	A supportive work environment with healthy relationships and fair communication is essential for an employee to be involved and take opportunity to outperform the task. In addition, work itself needs to be empowering, management with a provision of right job to a right person with meaningful tasks empower employee to take decisions in handling their work activities which is not a simplest process it requires a supportive mechanism.	DDI (2005); Aitken, Marks, Purcell, Woodruffe, and Worman, (2006); Lockwood (2007); Robinson et al (2004).
Leadership	Sense of purpose	Superior's leadership is found to have motivational and inspirational qualities that drive employee engagement by building a leader member relationship. Particularly transformational leadership shows higher impact on engagement.	Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, (2011); Zhu, Avolio, and Walumbwa, (2009); Madhura and Deepika, (2014)

Job Resources- Motivation

Findings on various studies on JD-R model give insights into motivational potential of job resources in driving employee engagement. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007) job resources may intrinsically motivate employees as they foster employee growth, learning and development. Job resources also play an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. Certain job factors such as workload, role ambiguity and work pressure demand higher effort from employee and leads to physical and mental strain which are found to be diminishing engagement levels. Interestingly job resources such as proper feedback, support, and autonomy are found to be reducing effect of job demands (Bakker, Demerouti, and Euwema, 2005) and also drives engagement through a motivational process (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Conclusion

Thus employee engagement is a concept of contemporary importance. With the exceptional traits, engaged employees lead to a healthy organization as they are satisfied, committed, innovative and highly performing, with optimal physical, mental health. But engaging employees for organizational success is an easier task? No. Is it a one-time achievement? No. Is it impossible to develop a sustainable engaged workforce? No. Engagement is a continuum. It is possible to achieve an engaged workforce with a true effort from the management by facilitating them with right opportunities. People prefer work role that gives psychological satisfaction more than a monetary incentive. Understanding employee preferences and creating a platform to express and employ themselves at work is a major responsibility of management. Once provided, the satisfaction resulted from need fulfilment tremendously motivates employee to engage with task thereby performance.

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