

Driving Retention Through Employee Engagement: Suggestions from Literature

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Abstract

Globalization of the 21st century has made tremendous changes in employees demands and expectations from their jobs. As a result employees are switching their jobs and to balance the cost of substituting the employees who leave against the cost of retaining the employees is very high. So, the literature review has suggested to retain an employee with the help of employee engagement practices. Research has supported that engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave the organization and perform 20% better. Therefore, organizations to survive has to adapt and improve their people processes to retain their skilled and innovative employees in the current market place. In current time, sustainable improvement of people processes is the new paradigm.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Employee, Literature Review, Retention.

Introduction

In 21st century employee's demands and expectations of their jobs has totally changed, yet many organizations are still not altering their old practices (Johnson, 2014). Reason is, due to economic turmoil in recent past has had an up settling influence on many employees, as a result, they have chosen to switch their jobs in search of new opportunity which will provide them career certainty and financial security. However, unfortunately, many of those employees face difficulties in getting settled into their new roles, with uncertain outcomes. So, the big challenge for employers is there, to manage the onboard new recruits, so that they become more productive and integrate well within the new organization. This is a place where a fantastic opportunity for employers lies. Organizations should become a strong and positive brand because it helps to attract and retain the best talent anywhere in the world (Brewster et al., 2005).

According to Kelly Global Workforce Index (2013), in the year 2012 approx. 33% of Indian employees change their employers. Currently, the way employees feel about the work, they view their work and the way they select their jobs all play a pivotal role in way workforces are managed and developed. It's a high time for organizations make changes in their human resources strategies and procedures. Organizations, those still cling to their traditional practices will struggle and those adopt and improve will survive and grow. Organizations to survive has to adapt and improve their people processes to retain their skilled and innovative employees in the current market place. In current time, sustainable improvement of people processes is the new paradigm.

Globally speaking, due to increased competition and scarcity of highly skilled and talented employees make recruiting and retaining of talented employees as major strategic priorities for organizations (Fegley, 2006). However, research shows that due to shortage in labor market the “war for talent” is extreme (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005; Branham, 2005; Brewster et al., 2005; Cappelli, 2000; Lawler, 2005; Nybo, 2004; Sparrow, 2004), yet there has been a paucity of research aimed at competitive talent management and engagement strategies to retain the talent.

The key to employee retention is employee engagement (Glen, 2006), this area is led by practitioners (Baumruk et al., 2006; Bennett and Bell, 2004; Gallup Management Journal, 2006; Parsley, 2006; Woodruffe, 2005;) and demands for rigorous academic research (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006; Joo and Mclean, 2006; Luthans and Peterson, 2002). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the state of engagement as “emotional involvement or commitment” and as “being in gear”. The credit for the popularity of employee engagement goes to its positive consequences for organizations. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) articulated that engaged employees are expected to have a greater inclination towards their organization and a lower propensity to leave their organization. Social exchange theory advises that when both employer and employees are abiding by the exchange rules, result in more trusting and loyal relationship with mutual commitments (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and turnover intention and is negatively related to turnover intention (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

According to a global study done by the Corporate Leadership Council to measure engagement levels among 50,000 employees around the world, shows the direct impact of engagement on both employee performance and retention. The study shows that most committed or engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave the organization and perform 20% better. The survey also revealed that employee retention depends on a balance between emotional and rational engagement – i.e. compensation and benefits act as a strong driver for employees’ intent to stay.

Objective of the Study and Method

Due to mysterious labor market conditions and globalization, it is more critical to retain talented employees in order to become strategic sustainable in a highly competitive market. Thus, engagement and retention of employees become topmost priority for the organization. Consequently, there is a need to focus by researchers and scholars on employee engagement practices to influence the retention of human capital. This study focused to provide a conceptual framework with linkages to show the relationship between employee engagement and retention that will help both practitioners and researchers in further research. We hold a view that this is imperative in itself as it constructs a working model for driving retention from engagement practices embedded in the research literature to inspire practices and future research.

First, all published articles were searched for the keywords *engagement, employee engagement, work engagement, retention, turnover* and the search was limited to articles with keywords present in the title published or abstract. Journals representing human resource management, human resource development, business, management, leadership were searched: Proquest, Elsevier, Emerald, Sage, ABI/Inform, Jstor, PsycInfo, the Academy of Management database, the Society for Human Resource Management Journals, all four Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) journals, business and management magazines and research gate and google scholar were used additionally as a data collection sources. All articles with significance related to the topic were printed and reviewed by the authors. Relevant work and key contribution were noted in the data-books and used in the analysis throughout the research work.

Review of Literature - Employee Engagement

William Kahn's paper on personal engagement in the *Academy of Management Journal* (1990) is extensively-cited paper in the field of 'employee engagement' and he has been named as the 'founding father' of the field. According to Kahn engagement is arises when 'people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work-role performances' (Khan, 1990, p. 694). Engagement in terms of their cognitive, emotional and physical expression and Khan argued that disengagement involved the 'simultaneous withdrawal' of people's preferred selves in their behaviors from their work roles. Thus, engagement is linked with the 'needs-satisfying' approach to motivation.

Other researchers have viewed engagement differently, for instance, as the direct opposite of burnout; Maslach et al. (2001) Burnout-Antithesis Approach states that "burnout is characterized by low levels of activation and pleasure, whereas engagement is characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure" (Maslach et al., 2001 p. 417). On the other hand, Schaufeli et al. (2002) stated engagement and burnout as diverse concepts and experienced as opposite psychological states. Subsequently, he postulated Work Engagement Approach, which is separate from burnout. Schaufeli, Salanova and colleagues (2002, p. 74) defined engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption". In addition to this, Harter (2002) came out with the most widely read literature on employee engagement and with Satisfaction-Engagement Approach. Harter et al. (2002) conducted the meta-analysis of a huge data ($N = 7,939$) on employee engagement held at the Gallup Organization and defined employee engagement as an "individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter et al., 2002, p. 417). The fifth Multi-dimensional Approach of Saks (2006) hypothesized that employee engagement is developed from a social exchange theory and recommended two distinct states of engagement: *job engagement* and *organizational engagement*. Saks demarcated engagement "as a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance" (Saks 2006 p. 602).

As we have discussed the Kahn's (1990) approach for engagement, his definition for engagement implies that, employees of organizations feel obliged to bring themselves intensely into their role performances as reimbursement for the resources they receive from their respective organization. Employees are expected to disengage and withdraw themselves from their roles, when their organization fails to provide these resources. These socioemotional and economic resources provided by the organization predict employee engagement. Although little empirical research has been done on the factors that predict employee engagement, however, possible to identify a number of potential antecedents from different approaches given by various researches.

Need-Satisfying approach of Khan (1990) emphasizes on meaningfulness, safety and availability as a strong predictor of engagement. While burnout-antithesis approach of Leiter and Maslach (2004) supports a strong environment for different areas of work life is required for engagement to happen. Schaufeli's (2002) work-engagement approach says that from engagement to happen job resources and job demands play an important role. Harter's (2002) satisfaction and engagement approach stresses on span of control, optimism and positive leadership. Multi-dimensional approach of Saks (2006) articulates that for engagement among employees' job characteristics, perceived organizational support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice and distributive justice of an organization are essential. Different approaches have different views of engagement drivers, although all these drivers provide positive consequences and this is the reason behind the popularity of employee engagement.

There is an acceptance that employee engagement has connection with business results (Harter et al., 2002). There are other number of reasons to believe that engagement is related to work outcomes. Kahn (1992) suggested that engagement leads to both individual-level outcomes (i.e. employee's experiences of doing work and quality of work), and organizational-level outcomes (i.e. productivity and growth of organizations). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) states that engagement's experience has been defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related experience and state of mind and related to positive work affect and good health (Sonnetag, 2003). These positive emotions and experiences are possible to result in positive work outcomes. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), noted that engaged employees are expected to have a greater attachment to their organization and a lower tendency to leave their organization. Empirical study to support this view was done by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) who found that engagement arbitrated the relationship between job resources and turnover intention and negatively related to turnover intention i.e. positively related to retention. A good employee engagement practices are the main motivator for employee retention. More convincing evidence for the relation between engagement and business outcomes comes from Harter (2002) meta-analysis of 7939 business-units. Results revealed that engagement is positively related to customer satisfaction, profitability, productivity, loyalty, safety and turnover.

Review of Literature - Retention

Employee retention can be defined as a "systematic endeavor by employers to create and nurture an environment that inspires current employees to remain

with the organisation". In simpler terms, retaining an employee for long duration of time is retention. The organisations that values their employees, respect their decisions, frame the best strategic policies and put effective retention practices in turn benefited from the strong commitment and high productivity of their employees. Innovative strategies that go far more than pay and benefits should be employed to retain the employees.

An effective human resource management strategy is needed to balance the cost of substituting the employees who leave against the cost of retaining the employees who stay (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984; Boudreau & Berger, 1985) since, it is more expensive to substitute strong performers than to substitute weak performers (Cascio, 1982). Meta-analysis of 24 turnover studies by McEvoy and Cascio's (1987) showed that an organization's weaker performer tends to have higher turnover rates than strong performers. New employees' job performance is also significantly related to their retention rates (Peters and Sheridan, 1988; Barkman, Sheridan, and Peters, 1992).

Retaining employees also affect organizational productivity by enhancing customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction and employee job satisfaction are directly proportional to each other (Anderson *et al.*, 1993). Therefore, higher satisfaction support in retaining the customers as well as employees. Satisfied employees from their jobs are more devoted for their work and are ready to go extra miles to improve the customers' satisfaction which in turn increases the organisation's productivity (Steensma *et al.*, 2001).

Organizational culture values also accounts for variation in employee retention across organizations (Kerr and Slocum, 1987; Kopelman and colleagues, 1990). Researchers also advised that an organization's cultural values inspires its human resource strategies, i.e. selection and placement policies, promotion and development tactics, and reward mechanism. Different organizational strategies, effects to form different psychological climates in varying organizations that foster varying levels of commitment and retention towards organization among employees. Kerr and Slocum, (1987) also suggested that some organization's culture values teamwork, security, and respect for individual employees to foster loyalty and long-term commitment towards the organizations. While other organization's culture values for personal initiative and individual rewards to foster entrepreneurial norms.

Konovsky and Cropanzano, (1991) suggested that employee retention is also possible when management addresses employee dissatisfaction. It has seen that, dissatisfied employees leave their job more frequently than satisfied employees (Churchill *et al.*, 1974). Hence, Voice Mechanism is one of the essential tools to acknowledge dissatisfaction. In the absence of the voice mechanism in an organization, the employees will look outside the organization and causes will be visible once they leave the organization, however, with an effective voice mechanism the organizations can reduce turnover (Spencer, 1986).

Researchers suggested that organizations must have some factors to retain employees for a longer duration (Williams *et al.*, 1994). The factors like organizational culture, pay compensation, growth in the organisation helps

employee retention (Fitzenz, 1997). Shaw *et al.* (2005) in their research revealed that the organizational micro-behaviour and the macro-strategies gap can be reduced by effective human resources strategies to retain the employees for the organizational sustainability. Kaliprasad (2006) advised today's organizations to have a sustainable competitive advantage they must educate and develop their employees for future challenges, for example, Motorola believes that it receives \$33 for each \$1 invest in its employee's education and training programs. Likewise, Wilson (2006) specified that the learning and development opportunities are the second most frequently cited action to enhance employee retention. Kaliprasad (2006) stated that stimulating and challenging work environment and participative management styles are the most effective strategies to retain talented employees. Organisations to compete and sustain competitive edge in the market should retain their high performers (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

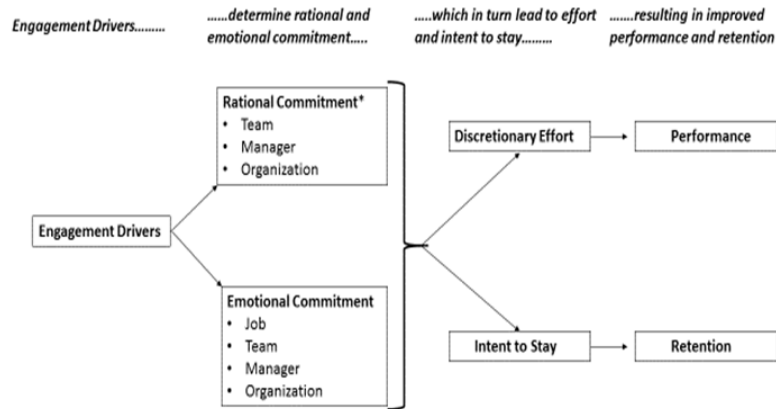
Driving Retention through Synthesis of Employee Engagement Activities

Employee engagement significantly influences organizational outcomes, ease of recruitment, employee productivity and employee retention (Bhatnagar, 2007). Corporate Leadership Council (2004) research on engagement levels among 50,000 employees in 27 countries, emphasizes the link between engagement and business success and engagement's direct impact on employee performance and retention. Additionally, Tower Perrin Global Workforce Study (2007-2008, p. 6) also supported the same thing that more engaged employees are more likely to stay with an organization. Many research studies advocated the above written fact that employee engagement is an important driver for employee retention (Alias *et al.*, 2014; Harter *et al.*, 2002; Hughes and Rog, 2008; Kennedy, 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Impressive talent management practices and policies indicate commitment to human capital, hence results in more engaged employees and less turnover therefore, employee engagement said to have a considerable effect on employee productivity and talent retention (Bhatnagar, 2007). Thus, managers should pay more attention to the activities that may help to retain the employees (Kennedy, 2010). It is widely accepted fact that employee engagement is vital for employee retention, hence discuss the employee engagement practices for retention and its mechanism.

Corporate Leadership Council (2004) proposed a new model for engagement that emphasizes business outcomes. Council proposed that employee retention depends more on a balance between emotional and rational engagement and defines engagement as the degree to which employees commit to someone or something in the organization, how hard they work and how long they work as a consequence of that commitment. This outcome-focused definition of engagement help us to measure the tangible benefits of engagement, i.e. employee retention, hence, gives us a mechanism for employee retention through engagement. Council also identified 25 drivers of employee engagement that motivates the employee retention.

Figure 1. The Corporate Leadership Council’s Model of Engagement



Source: Corporate Leadership Council Research

Figure 2. The Top 25 Levers of Engagement

S.No.	Lever	Impact	Category
1	Connection Between Work and Organizational Strategy	32.8	D
2	Importance of Job to Organisational Success	30.3	D
3	Understanding of How to complete Work Projects	29.8	D
4	Internal Communication	29.2	O
5	Demonstrates Strong Commitment to Diversity	28.5	M
6	Demonstrates Honesty and Integrity	27.9	M
7	Reputation of Integrity	27.6	O
8	Adapts to Changing Circumstances	27.6	M
9	Clearly Articulates Organizational Goals	27.6	M
10	Possesses Job Skills	27.2	M
11	Sets Realistic Performance Expectations	27.1	M
12	Puts the Right People in Right Roles at the Right Time	26.9	M
13	Helps Find Solutions to Problems	26.8	M
14	Breaks Down Projects into Manageable Components	26.7	M
15	Accepts Responsibility for Successes and Failures	26.6	M
16	Encourages and Manages Innovation	26.5	M
17	Accurately Evaluates Employee Potential	26.3	M
18	Respects Employees as Individuals	26.1	M
19	Demonstrates Passion to Succeed	26.0	M
20	Cares About Employees	26.0	M
21	Has a Good Reputation Within the Organisation	26.0	M
22	Innovation	26.0	O
23	Is Open to New Ideas	25.9	M
24	Defends Direct Reports	25.8	M
25	Analytical Thinking	25.7	M

O Organizational Culture and Performance Traits
 D Day-to-Day Work Characteristics
 M Manager Characteristics

Source: Corporate Leadership Council Research

Conclusion and Recommendations

Human resources are the assets for the organization so, retaining them will help organization to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. In the current economy, proactive employers will sustain and continue to develop the potential of their human asset are likely to maintain the competitiveness. The organisations should create a healthy and growing environment for their employees, where they feel secure and engaged. If employees are satisfied with the engagement strategies of the organisation, will feel committed and stay longer with the organisation. The high morale, commitment, participation and satisfaction of the employees increase the organisational productivity. Finally, the literature continuously emphasized the remarkable effect of various employee engagement activities on employee retention and this correlation between engagement and retention is generalized across companies.

Although the researcher tried its level best in this research paper to discuss various engagement techniques and contribution by different researchers to retain human capital still much scope remains for further exploration in the field of consequences related to employee engagement i.e. increased productivity, low absenteeism, job satisfaction, increased business profits etc.

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